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CZECH FEMINISM  
THE CZECH FEMINIST MOVEMENT 1848-1914

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### ABSTRACT

The development of the Czech feminist movement was inextricably linked with nationalism. Nationalist ideology recognised the power of women as mothers and their consequent claim to equality within the context of the nation. Having implicitly acknowledged the justice of feminism, nationalists then had to accommodate women's demands. As nationalism changed from a cultural to a political force, feminine patriotism slowly became a feminist movement. These links with nationalism stimulated the development and self-confidence of the Czech women's movement but they also engendered in feminists an unjustified belief in the instinctive feminism of Czech nationalists. The movement's development reflected that of feminist movements elsewhere. Demands for education led to attempts to obtain for women a place in social and political life, culminating in the demand for the vote. In the Czech case, however, such political demands produced tensions in the feminist movement. They raised the question of whether feminists' first allegiance should be to women, or whether they should merge their campaigns with those of the nationalist movement, as represented by the many political parties which had women's rights on their programmes. Much of the energy of the movement in the last ten years of this period was absorbed by this debate and the more general issues of what feminists wanted to achieve and how they should do it. Even the non-feminist women's movements attached to the Social Democratic and National Socialist parties had similar difficulties. All these groups of women, feminist and non-feminist were concerned to define their place and establish themselves as an identifiable force. This led to an intense and fruitless preoccupation with organisation, which was only brought to an end when the First World War changed the assumptions of Czech political life.

## CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	2
CONTENTS	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
ABBREVIATIONS	6
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	7
The legal rights of women	
Women and Czech nationalism	
The development of a women's movement	
The socialist women's movements	
 <u>CHAPTER 1: THE BEGINNINGS: 1835 - 1880</u>	 37
Marie Riegrova and nationalist nursery education	
Literature	
 <u>CHAPTER 2: POLITICAL CHANGES: 1880 - 1898</u>	 93
The rise of the Young Czech party	
The rise of the Social Democratic party	
T.G. Masaryk	
The "progressive movement"	
 <u>CHAPTER 3: THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION</u>	 130
 <u>CHAPTER 4: THE ORGANISATION OF WOMEN WITHIN THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTIES</u>	 160
The agricultural and industrial labour force in Bohemia in 1900 and 1910	
The Social Democrats	
The National Socialist party	



## CONTENTS (Continued)

	Page
<b><u>CHAPTER 5: THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT: 1897-1914</u></b>	<b>214</b>
Feminist organisation	
Feminists and political parties	
Women's organisation in Moravia	
The feminist press	
Feminist ideas	
 <b><u>CHAPTER 6: THE BOHEMIAN WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT, 1905-1914</u></b>	 <b>283</b>
Election campaigns	
The Women's Suffrage Committee and the Bohemian Diet	
The methods and composition of the Women's Suffrage Committee, and its place in the Czech feminist movement	
 <b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b>	 <b>333</b>
 <b><u>APPENDICES</u></b>	
I. BIOGRAPHIES	344
II. BOHEMIAN WOMEN AND THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT	355
TABLES: Girls attending Gymnasia in the Non-Hungarian Lands of the Monarchy: 1905	357
Number of gymnasia for girls	
Number of female university students 1897-1917	
Former education of regular students at the philosophical faculty	
 <b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b>	 <b>360</b>

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ABBREVIATIONS

AHMP	Archiv hlavního města Prahy
ANM	Archiv národního muzea
AUC	Acta Universitatis Carolinae
CMM	Casopis matice moravske
CSAV	Ceskoslovenska akademie ved
CsCH	Ceskoslovensky casopis historicky
JMH	Journal of Modern History
LA.PNP	Literární archiv, památník národního písemnictví
SUA	Státní ústřední archiv
SUA/NRC	Státní ústřední archiv/Národní Rada Česka
UAD KSC	Ústav archivů dějin komunistické strany Československa

## INTRODUCTION

The fact that there was an active and internationally recognised Czech feminist movement before 1914 comes as a great surprise to most people in Czechoslovakia today. For some of them the phrase "women's movement" evokes the names of a few women writers - usually Karolína Světlá and Eliška Krásnohorská - but the names of women who were active in the feminist movement before and even after 1914 seem to have completely disappeared from the popular consciousness.

The reasons for this are too complex to be analysed properly here. Historians of feminism have difficulty in dredging up their heroines from the dustbin of history. The Czech feminist movement has suffered the fate of many others, and its achievements have been largely forgotten. Further reasons for the obscurity into which the women's movement has sunk are, I think, linked to the political situation in post-1948 Czechoslovakia. Communist ideology, as it prevails in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, maintains that the roots of women's oppression lie in the system of private property. Societies like theirs, which have abolished private property and socialised the means of production must therefore have done away with the real reasons for that oppression. Women may still find it hard to fulfil themselves completely, but no structural changes are necessary in society to enable them to do so. Any other approach to the woman question is - and always has been - wrong. Furthermore, the leading role of the Communist Party in society and the proscription of organisations which might be used as a channel for any group to express an opinion not in line with the view of the Party mean that independent organisations of women - past or present - are dismissed

as being diversionary or even destructive. The history of the feminist movement, which was composed of women who organised as women or as part of non-socialist political parties, is therefore considered to be unimportant and irrelevant. It is certainly no coincidence that the only official revival of interest in the pre-1914 women's movement came in 1968.<sup>1</sup>

The feminists, and even the women who were members of socialist parties have disappeared not only from the popular consciousness but from that of academics. Women's role in the cultural aspects of the national revival is usually acknowledged,<sup>2</sup> as is the feminist commitment of some women writers, but otherwise they have been forgotten. As far as I know since 1948 only one article containing original research on the subject has appeared in the Czech academic press, and that dealt with socialist women.<sup>3</sup> The omission is the more noticeable when one considers the amount of work on the subject - admittedly not all of a very high quality - which was produced before 1948. "Official" histories, for example the authoritative Přehled československých dějin make no mention either of the socialist women or of the feminists,<sup>4</sup> and one has to

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1. Vlasta, the official magazine of the Czechoslovak Women's Union, published several articles on the history of the women's movement in that year, including one on Luisa Landová-Stychová (23rd October) and one on the suffrage movement (20th November).
  2. For example, Josef Kočí, in his Naše národní obrození, (Prague, 1978), p. 400, mentions the involvement of women in nationalist salons and entertainments.
  3. Renata Wohlgemuthová, "Účast žen ve českém sociální demokracie", CsCH. 1968.
  4. Přehled československých dějin (A survey of Czechoslovak history) ed. O. Riha and J. Mešaros. 3 volumes, (Prague, 1958-1960).



turn to the work of Western students of Czech history to find even a passing reference to the part women played in 1848 and the whole pre-1914 period.<sup>5</sup>

The neglect of feminist history is, however, only a part of a more general neglect of the whole pre-1914 period by contemporary Czechoslovak historians. Few topics have been studied in any detail and these relate mostly to the working class and the organisations through which they expressed themselves - the Social Democratic party (though not the National Socialists) and the trade unions. They concentrate also on the forms of action which working people adopted, with studies of strike movements and the turbulent period from 1905-7. Anyone who wishes to examine other aspects of the period, particularly other political parties and personages, has to start at the beginning, and frequently finds that much material is not available.

The aim of this thesis is to show that a substantial Czech feminist movement did exist in both Bohemia and Moravia - though for reasons to be explained later it will deal mainly with Bohemia - and that it formed an important component of the Czech nationalist movement. Czech feminists can make no claims to have been outstanding theoreticians of the feminist movement, although they added a certain nationalist dimension to international feminism.

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5. Stanley Z. Pech's The Czech Revolution of 1848 (North Carolina 1969), devotes a chapter to the part played by women of all social classes in the revolution. Bruce M. Garver, in his The Young Czech Party 1874-1901 and the emergence of a multi-party system, (New Haven and London 1978), mentions the Czech movement for women's rights and some leading participants in passing (pp. 301-2).

But they were active, numerous and even successful. They founded the first girls' gymnasium in Austria-Hungary (1891) and helped to elect the first woman MP in Central Europe (1911).

Bohemia and Moravia were part of the Habsburg Monarchy. In one way the Czech feminist movement was a product of the particular national experiences of the Czechs in these provinces; in another way, however, it shared characteristics with other movements everywhere, both inside and outside the Monarchy. Feminism, understood as the desire to achieve equal rights for women, was a product of the nineteenth century. One can trace its intellectual roots back to the eighteenth century; rationalism and the doctrine of the rights of man. One could also find a few women of the period who acted on these precepts, who attempted to bring their fellow citizens to realise the inevitability and justice of women's rights - Olympe de Gouges is one example. But a great deal more was necessary before feminism could become a movement, something that awakened a response in a large number of women.

Feminism became a reality as a result of the social, political and economic changes of the first half of the nineteenth century. Feminist movements developed in countries or among peoples which were undergoing industrialisation; feminists were generally drawn from the ranks of the middle classes, who owed their expansion and prosperity to industry. The process of industrialisation brought enormous changes in family structures and living patterns. The increase in mechanisation and the erosion of the household economy deprived women of the work they had previously done, and at the same

time the growth of towns and the spread of an urban way of life was an additional tremendous dislocation. Once these things had happened - or while they were taking place - people could not have the same expectations of their way of life as they had had before. But there was a conflict between these expectations of a new prosperity and the reality of the new life experienced by women. The problem was expressed in the issue of "surplus women", an issue which prompted the formation of women's societies in most European countries.

"Surplus women" came to popular attention in the mid-nineteenth century; censuses of that period revealed that there was an excess of women over men.<sup>6</sup> The whole issue caused a great deal of worry, because it was assumed that a woman who could not find a man to support her could not support herself. The logical consequence was to demand that women be given the kind of education which would equip them to support themselves and to earn their own living in a respectable way.

The debate revealed a great deal about the position of women at that period. The extended family and the household economy could no longer provide an economic future for women. Moreover, it was clear that women of the middle class were expected to be idle, to be kept by a man. The women who had no chance of achieving this state of grace were seen as unfortunate victims. It was also taken for granted that paid work involved a loss of status for women.

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6. The first population statistics divided along sex lines for Bohemia date from 1830: 1,858,500 men to 2,029,472 women. By 1869 it had risen to: 2,468,104 men to 2,672,440 women and in 1900 the figures were 3,073,193 men to 3,245,504 women. Statistisches Handbuch des Konigreich Bohmens, Prague, 1913, Table 4.

The demand for jobs for women assumed that such jobs would have to be appropriate to their station in life.

Considerations like these led to the foundation of women's societies everywhere which tried to provide or fight for a certain type of education for middle-class women. The Austrian Marianne Hainisch described the motives and concerns of the Vienna Women's Employment Society (Frauenerwerbsverein) thus:

"Our women of the working class could feed themselves and their children if they became widows. Why could we middle-class women not make any money? It was, of course, a question of opportunities to do so, ones which would afford higher wages and a social position which corresponded to one's husband's."<sup>7</sup>

From this the path traversed by most women's movements led to demands for equal education with men, then political rights, and then frequently to a wider involvement in social and moral reform. The type of women involved and the methods they used also changed over the years.

Within the Habsburg Monarchy there were almost as many feminist movements as there were nationalities - German, Czech Hungarian, Slovak, Ukrainian, Polish, and probably more. The Germans, Czechs and Hungarians were the largest of these. The Hungarian movement was - naturally enough - confined to Hungary and had little effect on or contact with events outside. The Czech and the German women's

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7. Marianne Hainisch, "Zur Geschichte der österreichischen Frauenbewegung", in Frauenbewegung, Frauenbildung und Frauenarbeit in Österreich, ed. Martha Braun. (Vienna 1930), pp. 13-24.



movements, however, were active in the same half of the Monarchy. In Bohemia and Moravia there were frequently feminist organisations of both nationalities in the same place. But the Czech movement was additionally a nationalist movement, opposed to the Germans, distinguishing itself and its participants, Czech women, from their German counterparts.

The two movements developed under the same restrictive laws, responded to the same external political events, but they were irretrievably different in character. In my opinion it would be true to say that the Czech movement had a broader base, more political and popular support. (Czech suffragists got more than 20,000 signatures for their petitions; Austrians got something nearer 4,000.) Czech women seem to have made an impact out of proportion to their small numbers.

An extensive comparison between Czech and German feminist movements in the Monarchy would not be useful, because in fact the two groups, while operating in the same provinces, had very little contact with each other. But the Czechs were not isolated - quite the reverse. Within the Monarchy they had links with the other Slav women's movements. The emergence of a Czech women's movement had been influenced by the example of those in North America and England; Czech women later became enthusiastic members of the international women's suffrage movement.

Although the Czech feminist movement covered Bohemia and Moravia, the two provinces were in fact rather different from one another, and these differences were reflected in the organisation and success of the movements in each province. This thesis concentrates



on Bohemia, using the movement in Moravia for comparison and contrast. Bohemia was more industrially developed, with a correspondingly developed and diverse nationalist movement. The feminist movement reflected this diversity, encompassing many different shades of opinion and degrees of political commitment. In Moravia the leadership of the movement and the control of the feminist press was in the hands of a few women, but this was not the case in Bohemia. For our purposes the fundamental difference between the provinces was a legal one - the Diet suffrage law. The suffrage movement was the most important struggle of the pre-war Czech feminist movement. It was concentrated in Bohemia, because the women there still possessed a certain right to vote and be elected, and it was directed primarily towards protecting and extending those rights. Moravian women no longer had such rights and could not organise a similar suffrage campaign in their province. They were therefore rather on the sidelines of many of the major debates within the movement.

Mid-nineteenth century Bohemia possessed the preconditions for the existence of a feminist movement. It was a relatively advanced industrial area - the most developed province in the Habsburg Monarchy. Furthermore, in their political development, the Czechs took for granted a certain degree of political participation. The actual development of a women's movement was linked to the Czech national revival and the subsequent development of Czech national politics. Women were active in the national revival in the 1830's and 1840's and in 1848. After the "decade of absolutism" which followed, they began to re-emerge into political and cultural life in the 1860's.

Finally, in the 1890's women's movement began to emerge, to organise itself and to assume an independent identity. It was not, in fact, until this last phase that the words "feminism", "feminist" or "women's movement" really came into common currency in the Czech language. Before that, women's aspirations had been described by the term "emancipace" (emancipation) and their situation, the problem they posed to existing social relations by the phrase "Ženská otázka" (woman question).<sup>8</sup>

This work attempts to draw a distinction between feminist and non-feminist women's movements. "Feminism" is generally defined as the desire to achieve equal legal rights for women. All the women who are described here (and who described themselves) as feminists wanted to do this, though for some of them legal equality would only be the first step on the road to real equality between men and women. Feminists generally also had another thing in common; they organised together as women independent of political parties. Within the Czech women's movement this distinction later became blurred as many feminists joined political parties, but most of these also retained some allegiance to independent women's groups. More importantly, they saw themselves as fighting for women's emancipation within their parties, putting the feminist point of view

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8. According to the Příruční slovník jazyka českého (Prague, 1930-37), Karásek still used the word "feminismus" to mean "womanliness" in the 1890's. It attributes the words "feminista" and "feministický" to Čapek-Chod and Krásnohorská respectively, which would locate their use in the 1900-1914 period. "Woman question" may seem a clumsy translation, but it seems to have been an accepted phrase in English at the time. Theodore Stanton, in The Woman Question in Europe (New York, 1889), collected a series of essays on women in various countries under this title.

so that men could not ignore it. This distinguished them sharply from the non-feminist, socialist women's movement. For women in the socialist parties, independent feminism was to be shunned. Socialist theory laid down that, come the revolution and the downfall of capitalism, both women and men would be freed. The working class was oppressed by capital, regardless of sex; women and men should combine to overthrow it. Independent organisation by women was deemed to be destructive, because it diverted their attention from the real struggle against capital. And in any case, the argument ran, once the working class was in power, it would be able to lay the foundations for women's emancipation. Women in the socialist parties, therefore, although organised separately from men, did not see themselves as fighting independently for women's rights, and shied away from confrontation with their male comrades.

#### The legal rights of women

The legal position of women in Bohemia was governed by the Civil Code of the Habsburg Monarchy, most of which dated from the reign of Joseph II. Parts of it had been changed and modified by the 1867 constitution and subsequent laws relating to the suffrage. In most cases the rights of women in Hungary were the same, though they differed in certain important instances, for example, the law of association and the right to vote.

In the middle of the nineteenth century women in the non-Hungarian parts of the Habsburg Monarchy enjoyed a legal status and political rights which were not significantly different from those enjoyed by their contemporaries in other European countries. If anything, they



had slightly more freedom, but one could hardly describe them as independent or their position as enviable. Although the Civil Code discriminated against women they nevertheless had more rights under it than under the equivalent laws of other European countries, especially as it related to the disposal and enjoyment of property. Throughout their lives women were likely to be subject to the authority of a man; when they married they would merely exchange the authority of the father for that of the husband. Upon marriage a man would assume control of his wife's person and her movable property. He was her legal representative and the legal head of the family. The wife had to take his name and follow him.<sup>9</sup> Although she was bound to "assist" her husband, she had no legal rights over their children unless he died, when she might be appointed their co-guardian. Children took their father's name, he decided their profession and administered their property.<sup>10</sup> If the marriage was dissolved the mother had custody of the children only when they were very small.<sup>11</sup> Only when a child was illegitimate did the mother have any right to keep it and provide for it, for illegitimate children were excluded from the family rights enjoyed by the legitimate. Illegitimate children still had to have a male guardian as their legal representative, however.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Paragraphs 91 and 92. I have used the English edition of the Civil Code: General Civil Code for all the German Hereditary Provinces of the Austrian Monarchy, translated by Joseph M. Chevalier de Winiwarter, Vienna, 1865, 1868. (Two vols).
  10. Paragraphs 146, 148, 149.
  11. Paragraph 142. She had control over boys till the age of 4 and girls the age of 7.
  12. Paragraph 166. Women were not allowed to become guardians "as a rule" (paragraph 172). They were also not allowed to witness wills (para. 591).

The Civil Code provided for both civil marriage and divorce; the latter was decided on by a tribunal, and could only be granted after a separation. From 1856-70, however, when the Concordat between the Austrian state and the Vatican was in operation, the church had jurisdiction over marriage law, and both civil marriage and divorce were impossible.

As far as property was concerned, women had limited possibilities of economic independence. It was stated that "the matrimonial union alone does not constitute community of goods between the spouses... For that purpose an especial contract is required."<sup>13</sup> If none was made, each maintained his or her former right of property, and the other had no claim on that which their spouse subsequently acquired.<sup>14</sup> Any dowry the wife brought belonged to the husband, except if it consisted of immovable property, when he would be the usufructuary.<sup>15</sup> As her legal representative he was presumed to administer her "free property", unless she opposed this, and he was not bound to keep account of how he had managed it.<sup>16</sup> It would appear, therefore, that rich women with inherited land or assets could preserve some economic independence.

Women's entitlement to political rights was varied and ill-defined. The rights they possessed were based on property or professional status. They did not reflect any wish on the part of the Austrian authorities to include women in their calculations but

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13. Para. 1233.

14. Para. 1237.

15. Paras. 1227, 1228.

16. Para. 1239.



rather their utter confidence that women would never enjoy political rights. Women "great landowners" were allowed to vote to the Reichsrat in the great landowners' curia before 1873. In some provinces - one of which was Bohemia - they, and women taxpayers who paid more than 8zl. in taxes also possessed the communal franchise, as did members of professions, who had an "honorary right" to vote.<sup>17</sup> Teachers were the main group of women to benefit from this. The communal franchise formed the basis of the franchise to the provincial Diet. Both men and women without property or professional qualifications were excluded from the franchise until 1897. When the Reichsrat franchise was extended it included only men, thus proving that the legislators had never intended to include women. In the provisions of the law of association (1867), the unfitness of women for political activity was further emphasised. They, along with foreigners and minors under 24 were forbidden to belong to "political societies".<sup>18</sup> There were various ways in which this provision could be overcome; women could form "free organisations" which were not technically political societies, and could attempt to engage in a certain amount of political activity undetected. Despite the law of association women were able to become members of political parties, although their activity within them was restricted.<sup>19</sup>

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17. See Chapter 6 on the suffrage movement.

18. Law 134. 15th November, 1867. Para. 30.

19. It appears that they used paragraph 2 of the Staatsgrundgesetz, which dealt with the universal rights of citizens, as a way of getting round the restrictions and joining political parties, but it is not absolutely clear. In 1913 the law was changed (with effect from 1915), so that women could participate in political societies.

The prohibition seems to have affected the formation of independent feminist societies most of all.

### Women and Czech nationalism

The origins of ideas about women's position in Czech history are inextricably linked with the social and intellectual origins of the nationalist movement. The Czech national revival gathered its strength from various sources. Nobles had used the Czech language as a political tactic at the end of the eighteenth century, as a way of asserting provincial rights against the centralism of Joseph II. Simultaneously, however, Joseph's adherence to the doctrines of the Enlightenment created the social and intellectual preconditions for a national awakening. The introduction of freedom of conscience and the relaxation of the censorship paved the way for an intellectual revival. Joseph also improved the legal status of the peasantry and brought them economic prosperity. They were the largest remaining Czech-speaking stratum, and this created the possibility of upward social mobility for them and the Czech language. The nature of the early Czech national movement was determined by this. Early nationalist leaders were generally of lower middle class or peasant origins, and they viewed the development of the Czech nation from that perspective.

The most important element in the definition of women's role in the nation was the interpretation of Czech history undertaken by these early nationalists, particularly František Palacký. To understand the past was essential before one could understand the present or explain the future. The Czechs had to justify their own existence, and history helped them to do this. It was inevitable that

in rediscovering their history they would look for qualities which distinguished them from other nations, particularly the Germans, and pay greatest attention to the most glorious periods of it. They chose to emphasise the democratic, domestic, peace-loving nature of the agricultural Slavs, as documented by their earliest history (and by manuscripts forged for this purpose at the beginning of the nineteenth century) and then, as a manifestation of this democracy and the power of Protestantism, the Hussite movement. For our purposes it is irrelevant whether their historical interpretation was correct or not, for their picture of Czech history took into account the role of women, and this served as a justification of women's part in the nationalist movement. The fact that women had been important in the past also proved that the Czechs had always been democratic, and so nationalism and feminism reinforced each other.

An early male sympathiser with women's emancipation, writing in the early 1860's, provides an apt illustration of nationalist myths about women. Arguing that respect for women develops concurrently with family feeling, and that this was highly developed among the Slavs and especially among the Czechs, he continued:

"The more the Czech revered the family union the less he absented himself from it; the more, certainly, he cleaved to it, cleaved especially to the women, who is its centre."<sup>20</sup>

He argued also that the Czechs were an "educated" nation, in that

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20. J.V. Sládek, Emancipace žen, Sborník národního muzea v Praze. Řada C, literární historie. Vol V (1960), number 3-4, p. 108.



they were settled and peaceful and were not barbarians. Educated nations were the most sympathetic to women:

"From the beginning of history the Czechs were, therefore, quite educated, so that they could afford women a decent position. The especial tenderness which is a feature of the Slav nature assisted this still further; it is a nature which would not permit harm to be done to animals, still less to women. Many things testify to this gentle attitude to women and to the fact that they were not considered slaves. The Czechs had their priestesses and princesses, whose world was sacred to them and guided their actions. At a time when the neighbouring Germans could hardly tolerate the authority of one of their bloodthirsty kings, the Czechs bowed under the weak women's hand of Libuše... In the Králodvorský manuscript women are described as friends and men go to war for them."<sup>21</sup>

According to popular legend it was a woman who founded the first Czech dynasty, the Přemyslids, some time in the ninth century. She was Queen Libuše, the daughter of Krok, who brought the Czechs to Bohemia. However, even in the ninth century it was apparently unacceptable for women to rule alone, and she took a husband, a ploughman called Přemysl, thus demonstrating her democratic spirit. It was Libuše who chose Prague as the Czech capital. The legend of Libuše also affords the first demonstration of female separatism in Czech history. Before her marriage she had an army of women and when she married they were offended. They separated themselves from men under the leadership of Vlasta and built a castle, Děvin, from which they carried on a war against men.

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21. Ibid: (The Králodvorský manuscript was one of two which were later found to be forgeries. See Chapter 2).

Apart from these auspicious beginnings women did not play a very prominent part in Czech history from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. Only with the Czech Reformation and the Hussite movement did women begin to become visible in history as well as in myth. They seem to have been enthusiastic recipients of Reformation ideas. The preachers Jan Milic, Matej z Janova and Tomáš ze Štitný all made a point of addressing themselves to women. Milic rescued prostitutes in Prague and set up a refuge for them. Štitný emphasised the need for women to lead a pure life but be of service to others; his daughter was a pious woman who lived in a community of other women attached to the Bethlehem chapel in Prague. There were many of these women's circles (bekyně), whose members spent their time in prayer, meditation, singing and reading holy books. Hus himself held traditional views on women, maintaining that they were of a lower order than men, but the atmosphere of religious enthusiasm obviously captured the minds of Bohemian women in the fifteenth century as it captured those of English women in the seventeenth.

In the Hussite community of Tábor women had some kind of equality with men. Adult women were addressed as "sister"; they were full members of the community and thus had a voice in its government. Women apparently fought in Žižka's armies. The movement also produced its chiliastic sects in which women played a part. One such were the Adamites, who renounced marriage and went around naked.<sup>22</sup> The Hussites, though, had a very strict moral code.

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22. H. Kaminsky, A History of the Hussite Revolution, Berkeley, 1967, pp.424-30, quotes the chronicle of Laurence of Brezova: "Wandering through forests and hills, some of them fell into such insanity that men and women threw off their clothes and went naked, saying that clothes had been adopted because of the sin of the first parents but that they were in a state of innocence; from the same madness they supposed that they were not sinning if one of the brethren had intercourse with one of the sisters, and if the woman conceived she said she had conceived of the Holy Spirit."



After the Hussites had been crushed their ideas lived on in the Unity of Czech Brethren. In the seventeenth century one of their most distinguished members, J.A. Komenský, expressed the idea that girls should be given at least part of the same opportunities as boys in his revolutionary writings on education. All people were equal in God's eyes, he maintained, and women were as intelligent and talented as men, if not more so. If women were well educated they were less likely to be inquisitive and empty headed.<sup>23</sup>

This democratic and Protestant tradition was identified and emphasised by the early nationalist leaders as something specifically Czech. Some later nationalist historians denounced it, but all those who sought to explain women's emancipation in terms of the nation, (the most prominent example being T.G. Masaryk), accepted it as a framework. However, although it took care of the past, the world had changed a lot since these views were formulated. Behind the arguments which justified women's equality in terms of Czech democracy and vice versa and nineteenth century produced many fundamental conflicts and uncertainties about what women's role should actually be.

The most obvious role for women in the nationalist movement was one which no man could play, that of mother. The idealisation and support of motherhood has always been a component of nationalist ideologies of every political tendency. All nations which are

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23. Komensky thought that girls should be able to attend the first school of his educational system (ages 6-12), but took it for granted that they would not continue to the gymnasium. "Didactica magna 9, para. 5," Veškeré spisy J.A. Komenského, (Brno 1913), pp. 120-22.

conscious of their own national culture and national values are also concerned about national survival and therefore with motherhood. One could cite as an example the Mutterschutz movement in Germany, or even the concern with maternal welfare which became evident in England at the turn of the century.<sup>24</sup> In the Czech case this concern with motherhood stemmed also from the nature of Czech nationalism during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Czechs were an embattled nation surrounded by German influences. With the exception of the years 1848-9 they had no political voice till 1861, and during this time there were few Czech journals and no regular daily newspaper. Education in publicly recognised schools was in German and cultural activity, though it flourished in the years before 1848, was still very much privately organised, centred on individual families and their salons. In this situation women and their function in the family were important because they could act as the preservers and transmitters of national values, which no existing institution could. In the face of a hostile world they could create a sort of cultural cocoon: in the words of J.V. Sládek:

"...the man creates the outer history of his people, she the inner; the upbringing of individuals, the creation of the firm characters it needs, the imparting of virtues and the ennobling of life and morals is the work of the woman, she builds temples to the gods and prepares a refuge for the man, weakened and tired by the toil of life."<sup>25</sup>

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24. The Mutterschutz league in Germany was supported by many feminists. Although most of its activity was concentrated on social welfare for unmarried mothers the ideology behind it had a strong Social Darwinist tinge - the racial improvement of the nation, allowing only the "healthy" to breed, etc. Richard J. Evans, The feminist movement in Germany 1894-1933, (London, 1976), pp. 120-139, 158-64.
25. J.V. Sládek, Emancipace žen, p. 102.

These women would be able to speak Czech to their children and bring them up to respect the language; they would be able to counteract the popular prejudice that German was refined and Czech uncouth and bring their daughters up to be proper Czech women rather than refined German ladies. This train of thought associated patriotism with womanliness. Germanised refinement was considered to be synonymous with helplessness in the domestic and family spheres, an incapacity to do anything other than play the piano and speak French. Nationalist mythology held that the real, practical women were Czechs.

The contribution which woman made as a mother to the preservation and advancement of the nation was enough to prove her importance. However, it was not a voluntary contribution. It was incumbent on all women to do their patriotic duty as mothers, for otherwise the nation might be in danger. Underneath the expectation that patriotic motherhood was a duty lay the assumption that women could only begin to ask for rights when this duty had been discharged - that motherhood was the specific mission of women and that within the national movement they should occupy a separate sphere from men. However, nationalism also preached women's equality within the nation. If the nation were to be strong and assert its identity it had to have every possible source of strength at its disposal. This included women. Women were seen as having a right, for example, to equal education, because they needed to be made aware of the national struggle so that they could participate in it. There was thus a tension between women's rights as a member of the nation and her duties as a mother of the nation. The development of a really "feminist" movement, as

opposed to a nationalist movement of women meant that the idea of women and men being on an equal footing within the nation gained support. Those who supported it tended to reject the old ideals of patriotic motherhood.

#### The development of a women's movement

Before and during 1848 Czech women were very active, but their activity cannot be seen in terms of "emancipation" or "feminism"; neither word had yet entered the Czech progressive vocabulary. Later feminists writing about the period coined the phrase "patriotic feminism" to describe it.<sup>26</sup> In one way this is apt, for women were trying to obtain an equal place for themselves within the nation, but it implies the existence of a feminist consciousness. It would be more correct to say that this was a movement of patriotic women who wanted to assert the validity and usefulness of their patriotism. They hoped to spread patriotic ideas among women in the same way as patriotic societies spread them among men, and they were concerned mainly with education. They set up schools for girls and classes for women. Although some of them did aspire to give girls an education which was equal to boys' their aims were not really academic. They wanted to make women into fit companions for men, to give them some understanding of what men were doing for the national cause, so that they would be able to complement it and do as much as they could in their own sphere. It was generally

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26. For example, in Vlasta Kučerová, K historii ženského hnutí, (Brno, 1911).



agreed that women and men had separate areas of influence in life, and the education they fought for was bound to affirm this point of view rather than question it.

Despite these limitations, later feminists looked on these women as their predecessors, who had taken the first steps along the path which led to the development of the Czech feminist movement. The aims of these pioneers hardly corresponded to those of the later feminists, but it was enough that they were nationalists and women.

The reaction after the 1848 revolution nipped most plans for women's education in the bud. The schools which had been planned were either not established or did not last. When nationalist political life started again in the 1860's the need to make women aware of their responsibilities to the nation was still the principal factor in deciding the activities which women took up and ensured that education remained a priority. However, since 1848 there had been changes in women's social and economic status - or perhaps more correctly, the gradual process of change which was occurring as a result of industrialisation was reaching the stage where it could no longer be ignored. There were the "surplus women", who needed to be able to provide for themselves and therefore required some education or training, and there were the poor, whose poverty was brought sharply to the attention of the rising middle classes under the new conditions of urbanisation. So the spirit of national education was turned towards providing opportunities for women and the working classes. Patriotic motherhood found an outlet in arranging national nursery education for the children of the poor in



order to recruit them for the nation at an early age and mitigate the effects of poverty on families. The limits of women's preoccupations remained the same as they had been before 1848, however. Their educational and charitable activity rested on the assumption that women who could fulfil the duties of patriotic motherhood would do so. They now merely recognised that some could not.

The idea of "emancipation" seems to have come into the Czech consciousness at about this time. It originated in the USA. People who had spent the 1850's there in exile returned, having been influenced by the American women's movement and anxious to adapt its ideas to Czech nationalism. They had an impact on the kind of women who felt themselves capable of being men's intellectual equals - often women writers - and as a result some educational clubs (particularly the American Ladies' Club) were formed. But no organised movement for the achievement of this emancipation emerged for nearly thirty years.

It was only in the 1890's that a movement which could be described as a feminist movement, in that it demanded equal legal and educational rights with men, began to take shape. It emerged not so much as a result of any internal dynamic within the existing patriotic women's movement but because the 1890's were a crucial decade in Czech political and social development. They were a time of political radicalisation and diversification, a prelude to the formation of mass parties in which all social classes and both sexes would be given a voice. The demand for equal rights for women was an aspect of this wider change, and the political parties

which emerged had to take account of it. Their acceptance of feminism was inevitable, justified in terms of the Czech national interest and the Czech democratic tradition; it helped to create links between the new feminist movement and the new nationalist movement which differentiated Bohemian women from their counterparts in other countries.

The demands for equal rights made by the feminist movement developed in two stages. In the traditions of the patriotic women's movement, feminists first demanded education. Now, however, they concentrated not on education for motherhood but on getting the right to equal academic education for women at secondary school and university. The demand for equal political rights was a consequence of obtaining equal educational rights and realising that they were inadequate in themselves. Czech feminists hardly bothered to demand legal changes, for example, alterations to the status of women in marriage, probably because they held to the popular Czech concept of the Austrian state as one which would never grant essential civil rights. Furthermore, Czech national interests were concentrated on making national gains from the Germans.

The demand for the vote was in a way an acceptance that education did not provide everything. Women had achieved only limited access to higher education; apart from teaching, the professions remained closed to them. Political representation was obviously necessary before society could be brought to acknowledge their rights. In Bohemia the women's suffrage campaign emerged from the 1905-6 campaign for manhood suffrage. Women's suffrage acquired political respectability because it could

be seen as part of a movement which wanted to wrest equal representation for the Czechs from an unwilling Austrian government. Feminists were able to link their campaign, the principal campaign of the women's movement, to the general political issues raised.

Involvement with the nationalist movement, however, shaped all these campaigns and determined the particular nature of the Bohemian feminist movement. It dictated the controversial issues and the debates on present and future strategy. The differences between the "patriotic feminists" and their successors were occasioned by changing perceptions of nationalism; among the later generation of women who rejected patriotic motherhood there was still ambivalence about the role of feminists in the nationalist movement. But the political programme of national liberation was always inextricably linked in the feminist mind with the idea of women's liberation. The whole nature of the nationalist movement, the way it justified itself by referring to the Czech democratic tradition, the fact that after 1900 most parties accepted a programme for women's equal rights, could only confirm this impression. Bohemian feminists therefore worked in an atmosphere of political acceptance which was unknown to their foreign counterparts. They could rest assured that once the Czechs achieved national independence (a term which was never very precisely defined), women would be emancipated too. This gave them enormous scope, it fired them with enthusiasm, but it also helped to foster the illusion that women's emancipation was top priority with Czech politicians. This vision of complete liberation in the future also helped to obscure the necessity of small-scale unrewarding work, pressing for minor reforms, which feminists elsewhere took

for granted.

One of the assumptions which could logically be made on these grounds was that Czech women had no need of an independent feminist movement which sought to achieve political ends or use political means; it could be argued that they were perfectly well represented by political parties, who had their interests at heart and welcomed their participation.

After about 1905, when the universal suffrage campaign politicised women on a large scale, the question of the value of independent feminism versus that of political participation became a fruitful source of dispute. The argument really centred on the main independent feminist organisation, the Women's Suffrage Committee. It was attacked by women organised in political parties, especially those in the Progressive party which, although small, had an active female membership. They thought the Committee had political aims (women's suffrage and the right of association) which could be achieved more successfully from within parties. The Committee, however, was sceptical about this for various reasons. Their main contention was that women's suffrage should not be a party political issue. Feminism was something in everybody's interest; it should be above parties. It should be left to the Committee to fight for feminist issues on behalf of all women rather than let them become a bargaining counter in political negotiations. In addition, the Committee's attitude was tinged with distrust of the men who made up the majority of members of political parties. It believed that they could not be relied on to put women's interests first at all times.



This question brought others in its train. If men could look after women's interests adequately, as far as purely formal legal changes were concerned, what were women hoping to achieve in politics anyway? And if these changes brought little perceptible improvement, what more could be done to further women's emancipation? Women sought to answer these questions by emphasising the quality of the social and political changes required to end women's oppression. They took as their starting point the failure of an equal rights approach to make any perceptible improvement to women's position and tried to go deeper and attack the causes of this, the derogatory attitudes towards women which existed everywhere.

A preoccupation with personal relationships between men and women might seem to be inconsistent with the patriotic tradition which tried to idealise its participants, but in fact it could be absorbed into it quite easily. The family had always been considered the most important unit of the nation, and it was founded on this relationship. Improving women's position within it could only improve the quality of the nation as a whole. Feminists now argued that family structures denied women equality and thus implicitly failed to live up to the nationalist ideal. Rejecting the idea which lay underneath much early nationalist thinking - that patriotic motherhood should be enough for women - they argued that it was precisely women's restriction to the activities which were dictated by their sex and considered proper to it which oppressed them. Within the family women were limited by the ideal of housewife and mother; for them to be really equal in the national struggle it was necessary that these expectations be modified.

The principal theorist of the feminist movement and proponent of these ideas was T.G. Masaryk. His feminism was very closely linked to his approach to the nationalist movement. He was opposed to the romantic nationalism which valued patriotic motherhood above all else; his ideas on the family received much support from women because of the emphasis he placed on relationships, hitherto ignored or taken for granted. Masaryk's concern was to establish moral standards which did not distinguish between men and women. Current attitudes condoned immorality in men while condemning it in women. Masaryk wanted to see men and women adhering to the same high moral standards, for this would engender a universal respect for women. Secure relations inside the family could only be based on mutual respect and the observation of common moral standards. Masaryk agreed wholeheartedly that the family was the most important unit in the nation, and maintained that only a family in which men and women were really equal morally could guarantee national progress.

In the terms of the Czech feminist movement a preoccupation with the family and sexual relationships did not mean an interest in free love. The popular imagination frequently associated feminism with free love, although in reality the overlap between the two doctrines was never very striking. In Bohemia the absence of any strong movement of women advocating either free love or the recognition of motherhood outside marriage is noticeable. There were some anarchists who were interested in the subject but they had few women followers, and emphasised primarily "free motherhood", i.e. contraception. The overwhelming stress placed by Czech feminists on the family ruled out any discussion of alternatives to it; instead they limited themselves to hoping for

inner moral change and the abolition of the double standard.

This may seem anomalous when one considers that most of the more active feminists were single women, but all feminists were deeply involved in the idea of national freedom. The family was - or, in a free Czech state would be - a microcosm of the nation; the attitudes towards women which it expressed would be general throughout society.

### The socialist women's movements

Although it was not "feminist" and would have nothing to do with the independent organisation of women the Social Democratic women's movement complemented the feminist movement in many ways, and one cannot really understand one without understanding the other. They were active at the same time and under the same conditions; they were forced to respond to the same issues. And there was also a certain personal and political overlap between them. Many feminists were anxious to co-operate with socialist women and supported many of the same issues - universal suffrage and protective labour legislation, for instance. There is some evidence that Czech socialist women reciprocated this and would have been willing to work with feminists on a limited number of issues. In terms of personalities, the leaders of both socialist and feminist women's movements were of similar social origins. There was not a huge gulf between the two movements; most feminists had to work for a living, although they tended to work in more professional jobs.

There were other similarities between Social Democrats and feminists, especially feminists in political parties. In both cases they were usually confined to women's sections and dealt primarily with women's issues. Both movements, moreover, were dogged by similar problems, which were reflected in their intense and fruitless preoccupation with organisation. Both, of course, were sustained by a vision of what things would be like "after the revolution"; and both were disappointed.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE BEGINNINGS: 1835 - 1880

The role of women in the awakening of an oppressed nationality and the cultivation of national feeling had always been appreciated from the earliest stages of Czech nationalism. At first, however, women were not directly involved in nationalist activity. They were gradually drawn into it only in the mid-1830s. Women began to understand their own importance and to act independently to improve themselves and thus improve their contribution to the national movement. The main thrust of the Czech national revival before 1848 was cultural; scope for political activity was severely restricted under Austrian rule during these years, but even when it became a possibility women were not involved. Their contribution remained confined to the cultural sphere, the production of literature and the struggle to improve the quality of girls' education.

The educational role played by women as mothers made them peculiarly suited to the production of patriotic literature with a didactic purpose. They could teach their public, and particularly girls, what patriotism should mean to a woman and point out the qualities which should distinguish enlightened Czech women from German ones. The work of M.D. Rettigová (1785-1845), is an example of this kind of approach to literature. Rettigová is now remembered as the author of the first Czech cookery books,<sup>1</sup> but in fact she was one of

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1. "Domácí kuchářka aneb pojednání o masitých pokrmech pro dcerky české a moravské" (Hradec Králové 1826) was the first, followed by four more; cookery books and more general works on household management.

the most enlightened women of her time, who founded educational circles for girls and women in the provincial towns where she lived.<sup>2</sup> But although she herself may have been 'advanced', the ideas which she put forward in her literary work were not. Most of her work consists of moral tales - of the boy meets girl, boy loses girl variety - designed to show Czech girls the correct way to behave. In telling her readers what to do to keep your man and make yourself the most popular girl in the village (or, alternatively, how to avoid falling for the wrong kind of man, usually a social superior,) Rettigová painted a depressing picture of decorous, modest self-effacing womanhood - the ideal to which all good Czech girls should aspire. Here, for example, is Poor Ruženka, a girl of sterling spiritual qualities whose face has been disfigured by smallpox, whom Rettigová compares unfavourably with her beautiful but horrid sister Hortensie:

"Ruženka was a sweet, quiet, good girl, contented in her heart; she loved God and her parents above everything. When Hortensie was out visiting or at parties, she used the time to refine her soul and her heart; she educated herself by reading good books;... occupied herself with work that was suitable to her station in life and looked after the household... she was pleasant to all the servants and so won the hearts of all who shrank before the proud Hortensie."<sup>3</sup>

It goes without saying that she gets her man and lives happily ever after. It was not part of Rettigová's aim to change women's ideas about their status in life or even to give them a larger role in their own national literature.

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2. She had already started to organize patriotic ladies' circles in 1820, when she was living in Ústí nad Labem, but her most well-documented patriotic activity took place in Litomyšl, where she lived from 1834 until her death. (Prof. L. Bartová, "Magdalena Dobromila Rettigová", in Královny, kněžny a velké ženy české, ed. K. Stloukal, (Prague 1940), pp. 350-361).
  3. M.D. Rettigová, Wěneček pro dcerky vlastenské, (Hradec Králové 1825), pp. 46-7.

Poor Ruženka appeared in 1825; ten years later the situation was beginning to change. Writing was one of the few respectable pursuits which a middle class woman could follow, and by the end of the 1830's enthusiastic female patriots were producing a large number of verses on a small variation of nationalist themes. Some of these verses even dealt with the position of women and their desire to be accorded a more active part in the nationalist movement. However, Božena Němcová, the only outstanding woman writer of this period, utterly despised most of her contemporaries, not so much because of their work as their motives, which she thought were mainly opportunist. Nationalist activity was now increasingly socially acceptable. In Němcová's opinion these women were not serious writers, they were merely following the fashion.

It was, in fact, difficult for women to participate actively in the nationalist movement while it still had no basis in social life. One should not deduce from this that women were passive and had no initiative, but remember the limitations which convention placed upon their lives. It was no easy thing to overstep the limits of correct behaviour and those who did, for example, Božena Němcová, generally suffered for it. For this reason, perhaps, the most important development in the nationalist movement from women's point of view was its popularisation through literature, amateur theatre and social events. This was due largely to one man, J.K. Tyl. Tyl was an actor and dramatist who, in 1835, formed an amateur theatre group, composed of many of the leading patriots of the day, to stage his own and other Czech plays. This enterprise lasted until 1837, and the plays were enthusiastically attended by Czech society. By the time the group was forced to stop performing it had already awakened a considerable



interest in Czech theatre. The performances were then replaced by patriotic evenings where people sang, played and recited Czech poetry.

The increasing success of these entertainments prompted Tyl and some of his friends, including F.L. Rieger, to organise the first Czech ball in 1840. The balls continued annually till 1847, and at the same time there started a series of Czech 'besedy'; patriotic social evenings which took place several times a year at the newly founded Městanská beseda. 'Besedy' and social circles began to spring up everywhere. Tyl and his supporters had taken the lead in establishing a social milieu where patriotism was the norm; social events which could bear comparison with those on the ordinary social calendar. This was especially important to women and girls, whose social life was generally restricted to such occasions. Although Tyl's conception of nationalism was later condemned, for example, by Havlíček,<sup>4</sup> he appears to have had substantial influence, both on the kind of patriotism which women then espoused, (Němcová said that his writings first awakened her to nationalism), and on the actual form which women's patriotic aspirations took. Most of the women who later gathered together to promote women's education first met in the literary and social circles which he helped to found.

The aspect of the national revival which chiefly interested women was the attempt to provide a national education. This was really a link between the cultural aims of the national revival and its later political development. It sought to provide an education in the mother

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4. Havlíček thought that Tyl placed too much emphasis on patriotism as a unifying force and too little on politics. He made his name as a journalist with an article criticising Tyl in these terms.



tongue which would acquaint people with their national heritage but, equally important, to educate the nation as a group, so that it and the other Slav nations would be able to take the foremost place in the Austrian Empire. Thus there was a strong emphasis on technical and vocational training, in order to create a nation of people with an extensive understanding of industry, science and technology. This type of education in Czech began in 1835 with the establishment of Sunday schools for craftsmen by the 'Association for the Promotion of Industry in the Bohemian Lands'. One of the teachers at these classes was Karel Slavoj Amerling, (1807-84), a man who was to have immense importance for the development of women's education. He had been trained as a scientist and was always interested in the popularisation of scientific knowledge; at that time he was also publishing a popular scientific journal Průmyslný posel (The Industrial Herald). But he was involved in these classes also because of his interest in education, and his desire to discuss methods which could be used to create a national educational system. He was in touch with F. Svoboda, the founder of the first Czech orphanage at Hradčany who had comparatively revolutionary ideas about education and upbringing.<sup>5</sup>

One of Amerling's great plans was the establishment of a national school. In April 1839, with the help of gifts and loans from rich patriots, a site for the school was bought and Amerling and enthusiastic friends started work to build and refurbish it. The school was to be called 'Budeč', the name being taken from one of Amerling's misconceptions

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5. M. Dyma, *Buditelská a pedagogická činnost K.S. Amerlinga*, in: Pedagogické dědictví K.S. Amerlinga, (Prague 1966), p.328. See also note 58 below.

about Czech history. He thought that Budeč had been an important Slav school which had been attended by St. Václav. In his choice of name he therefore expressed the desire to return to a (mythical) concept of Slav education, one which would fit the Czechs for their glorious future as it had once done for their glorious past. This emphasis on preparing the nation as a whole for the tasks ahead was evident in the kind of education which he wished the school to concentrate on. The first branch of education which he wanted to cultivate was teacher training. The quality and national consciousness of teachers were naturally of crucial importance in any plan for Czech education. Amerling concentrated on those who were already qualified teachers, holding regular meetings where they could come and discuss their work. In addition he ran courses for craftsmen, an obvious extension of what he had been doing at the Association for the Promotion of Industry.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, there were to be classes for women, the third neglected group; not only the ladies' educational circle which he had been organising since 1839<sup>7</sup> but also a girls' school.<sup>8</sup> Such a large institution would be able to provide extensive facilities for all its pupils. For example, the women's classes would have their own library, reading room and garden; they would also have access to all kinds of workshop, laboratories and an observatory. Amerling hoped also to include in Budeč a hospital, a mental home and a music school. Women's education would therefore be part of a huge whole, integrated into this as it should be into society.

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6. Ibid., p.326, pp.334-5.

7. See below, p.50.

8. Vlasta Kučerová, K historii ženského hnutí, (Brno 1911), pp.26-7.

As one might expect, few of these grandiose plans had much chance of coming to fruition. Amerling was not a practical man, and confidence in him quickly waned; moreover, some of his educational ideas were distinctly odd and did not inspire confidence in the liberal nationalists who originally backed him.<sup>9</sup> The whole venture collapsed in 1847, and thus the period of his greatest influence on women's education came to an end. This had been short-lived, but it should not be underestimated. Amerling was the first person to give concrete expression to the nationalist theory that women should be educated and to place women's education in practice within a social framework. Bohuslava Rajská probably expressed the sentiments of all the women he taught when she described him as a timely guardian angel who, "shows us the right path and explains our higher responsibilities."<sup>10</sup>

Naturally enough, Czech nationalist circles were small at this time, and the women who were interested in educating themselves were generally drawn from an even smaller section of society. The initiative in forming a women's education circle came from two important nationalist salons in Prague, which met at the houses of Josef Frič and Václav Stánek at the end of the 1830s.<sup>11</sup> Frič and Stánek had married sisters, Johana and Charlotte Reissova; they, with their younger sister Antonie,

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9. He thought, for example, that parents should not show any affection towards their children, which worried J.V. Frič. (J.V. Frič, *Paměti*, (Prague 1957-63) I, p. 131.

10. *Z let probuzení*, (Prague 1872); *Kniha první, paměti a korespondence B. Rajské*, 1839-44, p. 45.

11. There were also ladies' educational circles in the provinces - Rettigová's in Litomysl, pí. Oherálová's in Brno, pí. Vendolská's in Nedvědice, pí. Černá's in Jihlava. (From the observations of a traveller, Miloslav Hruban, in 1839, quoted in: Flora Kleinschnitzová, "Podíl ženy na národním obrození", in *Ceská žena v dějinách národa*, (Prague 1940), p. 126.)



seem to have been responsible for persuading the women who came to the salon to form a separate group. All three sisters had been brought up as Germans. Josef Frič, who came to their house as a tutor and married Johana introduced them to Czech culture. Stánek, whom Charlotte married, was his friend and also an enthusiastic patriot. Marriage into nationalist circles was a common way for women to become involved in the nationalist movement, but marriage brought with it so many material preoccupations that one is constantly surprised that any of these women managed to cope with their numerous educational activities. Johana Fričová, (1809-49), for example, although remembered now more as the wife of Josef and the mother of J.V. Frič was a highly respected patriot in her own time. She had twelve children and her letters to her female friends and relatives, most of them also involved in patriotic activity are filled with family worries and illnesses, which news is always returned in kind by her correspondent. When in 1848 a deputation of women was chosen to go to Vienna nearly all those originally selected had to withdraw because they had babies or small children who had to be looked after.<sup>12</sup> Constant pregnancy and an enforced preoccupation with family affairs nevertheless did not diminish their expectations of the part women should play in life.

Her sisters' example obviously had a profound effect on Antonie Reissova (1812-52). She was younger than them and had been influenced by nationalism from an early age. She changed her name to the more patriotic-sounding Bohuslava Rajská and determined to devote herself to the national cause;

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12. Fričová-Rajská, 16 September 1848, Z let probuzení (III), p. 61.



"I determined not to seek happiness for myself in the delight of one man - only the good of others should be my yardstick and my aim."<sup>13</sup>

She was placed in charge of the women's educational circle which Amerling taught. As we have seen, she was impressed by his interest in women's education and in 1842 decided to take the qualifying exams and become a teacher. She qualified in 1843, taught privately at first, and obtained government permission to open her own school in June 1844, expressing her decision to devote herself to this for at least three years. In December 1843 she wrote to Amerling:

"You know me and you know that I cannot live without patriotic activity, nor do I want to; you recognise also that if my school is to be led in the spirit and direction which I myself would want, it demands all my efforts; all my thoughts and desires must be concentrated on its success... If, however, I am to perform these duties - so great and so highly important, as I hope, for the future of our country - properly, I cannot - I must not - take other duties upon myself. You know the duties of a woman - a wife - and I know them. To me they are too dear and sacred for me to dare to devote only a quarter or even an eighth of my time to them. A girl in my position can be either a proper, whole woman or devoted to her school. Until two or three years have passed I cannot even think of taking more responsibilities upon myself or of entering into a closer union with the man whom my heart might choose."<sup>14</sup>

This meant an end to any hopes of marriage for a time. Rajská was vaguely hoping to marry the Slovak patriot Stanislav Hrobon, but, as she wrote in her diary in December 1843:

"The consciousness of the duties which I had taken on for my nation did not allow me to fall into his embrace."<sup>15</sup>

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13. Z let probuzení, (I), p. 29.

14. Rajská - Amerling, 10 December 1843, Z let probuzení, (I), p. 117.

15. 24 December 1843, Z let probuzení, (I), p. 120.

Soon, however, her plans were upset. In the summer of 1844 the household had a visit from the famous poet. F.L. Čelakovský. His wife had just died, leaving him with four small children. She had formerly been well known as a writer of patriotic verse,<sup>16</sup> and it had apparently been her dying wish that he should marry Rajská, thus providing the children with a new mother who was ideally qualified for the job. Čelakovský seems to have jumped at the opportunity and had come to Prague to ask Rajská to be his wife. Rajská was completely at a loss as to what she should do. She had always felt that her commitment to the school should come first, and then there was Hrobon. But he was becoming vague about plans for their future. Moreover, despite her patriotic determination, it does seem that perhaps the attractions of life as a single emancipated woman were beginning to fade. Her sisters refused to help her make up her mind, and Božena Němcová was eventually the person who gave her advice. The advice that she gave is interesting because it reveals how limited - and probably rightly so - were the expectations, even of a woman like Němcová, of the part which women could expect to play. She realised that Rajská was not in love with Čelakovský, or she would not have hesitated to accept, whatever her principles might have been:

"But if (what you feel for him) is the kind of love which you want to sacrifice for your country, for our cause, if all you respect in him is the martyr of the Slav nation - which would feel your loss so keenly here. - I beg you, do it, go over to the other side where you can be more effective, where you will maintain the honour of the entire Czech people, the father for his family and the family for the joy of the father and for our sacred cause; think what work you can do for us in this role... believe me, by the side of our bard, that magnificent Slav sun, you can help most of all."<sup>17</sup>

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16. She wrote under the name of Marie Ventová, (Flora Kleinschnitzová, "Podíl ženy na národním obrození", in Česká žena v dějinách národa, p. 128).
17. Němcová-Rajská, 8 August 1844, Sebrané spisy Boženy Němcové, ed. M. Gebauerová, (Prague 1912), vol. XII, pp. 3-4.

This was the argument which was needed for Rajská to accept Čelakovský. She thought that by his side she would have the best of both worlds, that a man with his understanding of the Slav mission would surely encourage her to pursue at least those independent activities which were not incompatible with being a housewife. Whether she regretted her choice it is hard to say. Her letters to Němcová are always reassuring, saying how pleased she is to be able to devote herself to Čelakovský. Fričová, however, formed a less favourable impression of the household. According to her, Čelakovský required that his wife concentrate on household duties; she was not even allowed, let alone encouraged to write.<sup>18</sup> Rajská was never again able to take part in the kind of educational activity which had been so important to her in Prague. The couple lived in Breslau till 1849; by the time they returned to Prague Rajská was already too ill to take more than a passive interest in what her women friends were doing. She died in 1852.

The expectations which these women had of the way their lives could develop seem to bear little relation to the statements which they made about the role of women and the activities they were actually engaged in. Perhaps they saw themselves as happy exceptions to the rules of feminine behaviour - and even they could not escape their inexorable destiny for long. Božena Němcová mocked the nationalist pretensions of other women; here is her verdict on a group of women who were trying to produce a Women's and Girls' Almanack under her direction:

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18. J.V. Frič, Paměti, (Prague 1957), I, pp.127, 169-70.



"It seems to me that our 'vlastenky' (patriotic women) were not so much concerned with why the almanack should come out; they were interested only in becoming famous quickly. They thought they could get by with translations and a few verses, but when they heard the words 'original work' their pens grew limp."<sup>19</sup>

Her advice to Rajská seems to demonstrate that she considered a sensible patriotic mother to be worth ten "vlastenky". Despite the fact that she herself could never have borne to be a quiet, self-sacrificing patriotic mother, that her experience of marriage was anything but happy, she did not hesitate to advise other women to do this as the only respectable course of action.

Similarly limited expectations were expressed by another female patriot, Honorata Zapová (1812-56). She was actually a Pole married to a Czech nationalist; she was a member of the women's educational circle, friendly with the Fričs and Němcová, and was very active in 1848. Practical education was one of her main interests; she was about to open her own school when she died. Her collected thoughts on women's education and their position in life were published posthumously in 1856. Nezabudky (Forget-me-nots) was not quite an etiquette book for women. It had chapters on love, marriage and family life, aiming to show women what to do at every point in their lives and in every situation. Reading it one cannot help but be amazed at the narrowness of the views expressed. Zapová here seems to have thought women capable of nothing:

"If the male sex rules the world, ours at least decorates it."<sup>20</sup>

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19. Němcová - Rajská, 24 July 1845, Z let probuzení, pp. 24-27.

20. H. Zapová, Nezabudky, (Prague 1856), p. 6.



Women's real responsibility was in the home, keeping it pleasant for her husband when he returned to it and looking after his children. Sons, however, would be her responsibility only for a short time; a woman could hope to keep up with her son's mental development only until he was 10, and then:

"How happy she is when the point comes when he already knows and can do more than she."<sup>21</sup>

It was for the sake of their daughters that women should educate themselves - so that they could teach them to be as self-sacrificing as they themselves had been. But if women were to 'educate' themselves, this should be in the domestic arts. Any other kind of education might make them discontented:

"Woman is destined to be a wife and mother, and the aim of every instruction, every rebuke, of her whole upbringing, is this: that she should manage to make her husband happy and bring up her children well."<sup>22</sup>

But despite the low expectations of both men and women the work on which the educational circles were engaged was not merely addressed towards making women better mothers. It was much more wide-ranging and was considered to complement men's activity in the same field.<sup>23</sup>

The women's circle which originated from the nationalist salons met mostly at the Fričs' house, where Johana Fričová put her dining room at their disposal, starting in 1839. The aim of the circle was self-education, as the first step towards patriotic consciousness. About twenty or thirty women would assemble at Fričová's house two or three evenings a week and would listen to a lecture.<sup>24</sup> The person who lectured most was Amerling; other lecturers were the composer Vašák,

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21. Ibid., p. 8.

22. Ibid., p. 124.

23. Kučerová, p. 25.

24. V. Tille, Božena Němcová, (Prague 1969), pp. 40-42.

who taught singing and music; the painter Klemens, who taught drawing; the doctors Josef Čejka and Kodým, who taught hygiene (zdravověda); and J.F. Šumavský, who taught spelling and Czech grammar.<sup>25</sup> It was Amerling who really organised the group, gave it a programme and responsibilities. As well as lecturing, he set them to work compiling a women's encyclopedia. This was intended to be a women's offshoot of the large Czech encyclopedia which the Matice česká was hoping to produce.<sup>26</sup> Work on it was in full swing by 1841. Amerling would assign subject headings to different students; they would go away and work on them and then bring their results back to be corrected. The actual work of writing the articles was supervised by his favourite pupil, Bohuslava Rajská. At the beginning of 1845, when she was preparing to marry Čelakovský, leave all her educational work and go to Breslau, Rajská carefully collected up all the work which had been done on the encyclopedia and the collection of books which the women had put together and handed it to Amerling, so that the women's classes at Budeč could continue the work.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately none of the material has been seen since. From incidental comments and letters we can piece together a vague picture of what the encyclopedia must have contained. Amerling seems to have intended first of all to deal with the practical knowledge which a woman required in the home. Then he meant to go over the things which a well educated woman should be expected to know. All we know is that this included a strong element of folklore, with articles on national costume, customs, mythology, songs and dances. They contacted Slav

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25. Pedagogické dědictví K.S. Amerlinga, p. 323.

26. Ibid., p. 319.

27. Amerling - Rajská, 14 January 1845, quoted in ibid., p. 143.

women throughout the Monarchy for this section. There was also to be a section on famous women, Slav and non-Slav, for which a series of portraits was commissioned.<sup>28</sup>

In 1843 the scope for women's and girls' education began to diversify. Rajská opened her school; Amerling's Budeč also opened, and the activities of the women's circle, now bigger than ever, were transferred there. Amerling was still the main contributor, though the range of subjects dealt with had now grown to include music, painting, science and religion, with a corresponding increase in the number of lecturers.<sup>29</sup> Rajská's importance in this new setting increased. Amerling wanted her to take on responsibility for the girls' school which he planned as part of Budeč, but she refused. The direction of the school passed to another woman, Hosková, who had been a member of the women's circle and had taken teachers' exams at the same time.<sup>30</sup> Rajská's own school was a great success; pupils were waiting to be admitted even before she had finished her examinations and by March 1844 she had fifteen. The curriculum consisted of languages - Czech, German and French - literature, needlework, and natural sciences if time permitted. When she decided to marry Čelakovský she was forced to hand over the school to another member of the educational circle, Eleonora Jonáková, some time in 1845. In June 1845 it had twenty-two pupils. By September 1846 Jonáková was taking

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28. Kučerová, p. 36.

29. Ibid., p. 29.

30. Amerling - Čelakovský, December 1843, F.L. Čelakovský. Korespondence a zápisky, (Prague 1917-33), III, (1915), p. 132.



in boarders and employing several additional staff. It was still doing well in 1850, when Čelakovský sent the three daughters of his first marriage there.<sup>31</sup>

The success of the girls' and women's sections of Budeč is more difficult to ascertain. Hosková did not teach there for very long, and in 1846 responsibility was assumed by Svatava z Michalkovic, soon to become Amerlingová.<sup>32</sup> On the collapse of the whole of Budeč in 1847 she transformed the girls' section into a school of her own, which lasted till 1869. Reports of this school vary. Amerlingová's critics, who included the Fričs, Čelakovskýs and Němcová, thought the school Germanised and Jesuitical. Němcová felt that it failed to give its pupils a solid grounding in anything:

"These girls are all dissimulation, all sensitivity and self-denial, all affectation: their hearts burn incessantly for their country and their people... but if you look closer, it is a yawning emptiness."<sup>33</sup>

Other pupils of the school, for example Tereza Nováková, spoke of it with affection, so it is possible that personal hostility between the Frič camp and the Amerlings, a result of the events of 1848, was to blame for some of this criticism.

Whether the circle of women went on meeting at Budeč for long is not clear. In 1845 a group of women and girls met at the Staněks'

31. Staněk - Čelakovský, June 1845, ibid., p. 347; 1 September 1846, ibid., p. 434; Čelakovský, 7 May 1850, reprinted in Korespondence a zápisky, (IV), pp. 34-5.

32. Amerling's marriage to her seems to have been a matter of chance. His aim was to find a bride whose patriotic fervour would match his own, and to this end he wrote to Rajská in December 1843 and asked her for the names of any good friends of hers whom she could recommend. She refused. (Rajská - Amerling, 10 December 1843, 7 let probuzení, I, p. 119.)

33. Němcová - Sembera, 18 August 1851, in: Sebrané Spisy B.N., XII p. 203.



house and were planning to produce a Women's and Girls' Almanack - supervised by Božena Němcová.<sup>34</sup> Reports of this indicate that this activity was a substitute for the now defunct educational circle, but it is difficult to know. In addition to the schools mentioned above there were also undoubtedly a number of others, like the one run by Henrietta of Rittersberg. We know little about this apart from the fact that its pupils compiled a celebratory booklet for J.V. Frič when he came out of prison.<sup>35</sup> The power of the idea of women's education was increasing rather than decreasing, and was sustained at least for a few years after the 1848 revolution.

In the revolutionary year of 1848 the women who had been active in these educational ventures played a constructive part. There were women on the barricades and women who were arrested for the part they played in the fighting.<sup>36</sup> The women mentioned above did not do this, but they did try to exert some influence on the course of events, and they tried also to translate the experience of these times into a plan for Czech women. Most of them were the mothers, wives, sisters or daughters of leading patriots, and were trying to involve women in the events in a way suitable to their standing and the expectations which patriots had of them.

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34. These were the "vlastenky" she so complained about.

35. J.V. Frič, Paměti (Prague 1960) II, pp. 480-1.

36. Stanley Z. Pech, The Czech Revolution of 1848, (North Carolina, 1969), pp. 320-1. In the June Uprising, for example a number of women were wounded; several were also arrested and imprisoned. From the police record of their occupations it appears that they were working-class women - maids, waitresses, day-labourers - but the part they played is unclear.

In the first few months of the revolution - from the March Days to June - women were not very much in evidence. After the June uprising, however, they began to come into their own. The uprising was followed by a hunt for possible conspirators - General Windischgrätz, the newly appointed commander of the imperial forces in Bohemia, appeared sure that it was part of a deep-laid conspiracy rather than an upsurge of popular feeling (much of it directed against him personally.) The search for possible culprits rounded up many leading patriots, including Josef Frič and Amerling.

This seems to have prompted women to take the initiative, and Windischgrätz's statement on 2nd August to the effect that the uprising was part of a conspiracy gave them a further incentive. On 16th August a meeting of women was called, with the intention of organising a protest against Windischgrätz's statement, and a campaign for the release of those who had been arrested. About four hundred women attended the meeting, both Czech and German, though it was Czech women who dominated it. This meeting was followed by a second one on the 18th August. As a result, a delegation of four women was elected to go to Vienna and present a petition with these two demands to the Emperor. The women obtained an audience only with the Empress, but soon after they returned to Prague, in mid-September, the prisoners began to be released. It was generally assumed that this was at least partly due to their intervention.<sup>37</sup>

But the most interesting thing about this campaign is that at the second meeting Honorata Zapová stood up and suggested that women

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37. S.Z. Pech, The Czech Revolution of 1848, p. 324.

might usefully occupy themselves in setting up a women's "reading circle" (čtenářský spolek). This would resemble the earlier women's educational groups, but would be better organised and have more definite aims. It would have a library and organise lectures; it might occasionally bring out a journal, and it would encourage other Slav women to follow its example. Most important, it would work towards setting up a national girls' school, ideally the equivalent of a boys' gymnasium. At least some of the teachers, it was hoped, would be drawn from the reading circle. Zapová described the necessity for such a school in urgent tones. Women must not bother solely about their own education, but also about their daughters'; and now, of course, was the right time to do it.<sup>38</sup>

Zapová's speech prompted the formation a month later of the "Slav Sisters" (a name soon changed, unfortunately, to the more prosaic "Society of Slav women"). Initially about thirty women were involved; Fricová was president, Amerlingová vice-president and Zapová secretary. The society decided to found a school immediately, rather than leaving this till the reading circle had begun to function. At the first meeting, (20th September, 1848) an Appeal to Czech Women, composed by Zapová and intended for wide distribution, was read out:

"Dear sisters, allow us to make a sincere observation on the upbringing of the female sex in Bohemia and Moravia, so that we may know what is necessary where, and what task we should set ourselves, now that there is nothing to hinder, the free development of nationality.

But first of all - although with an uncomfortable feeling - on what level, in what circumstances do we women stand? Of course this is not true of all, but let us say

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38. C. Zibrt "Sestry Slovanské, čili Spolek Slovanek r. 1848 v Praze" *Květy*, XXIX, (1907), pp. 28-9. /Quoting *Národní noviny* 19 Sept 1848/ *ibid.*, pp. 30-31.



that the majority of our sex knows and experiences nothing but domestic life; that is, organising, housekeeping, children, husband, and so on. Of course this is an important thing, to which we are also compelled by circumstances and family situation, and to which we gladly submit. But in the better off classes, where the woman is not chained to the stove like a slave we frequently find that she lives from one day to the next, not knowing how to start the day nor how to end it; all her worries are centred on amusement, clothes and frivolities; her character as a woman, a mother, a housewife dissipates itself in the trivialities of life, makes of her an incomplete creature, a moving body without the substance of a person.

Dear sisters! is this not utter neglectfulness?  
cannot we women be capable of something better? Or  
must we remain eternally a domestic instrument?  
Have we not sufficient brains, strength and power  
to reject our frivolity? Oh no, women, we are  
 people, we have brains, we have souls, we must not  
stand so far beneath men! Now is the time... do you  
 not see that everything is moving forward; do you not  
 see that the nations have risen to defend their human  
 rights? We must become worthy of our men, who shed  
blood for their country... Sisters, we do not think  
 that women should get mixed up in politics, that we  
 should go with our men into the field of battle to  
 defend our king and country - that is their duty, they  
 are capable of it and they perform it. We undertake  
 only that work which does not belong to men (like the  
sword does not belong to women), ... that is; to  
refine and educate the hearts of women...

Zapová then goes on to describe the education received by girls from well-off families - languages, sewing, drawing, music. They despise Czech as being unrefined and prefer to speak German. They know nothing about their nation, and refuse to acknowledge themselves as Czechs. Zapová points to what she thinks is the root of this trouble; the ignorance of their mothers.

... Until now, few people recognised that much lies in our (women's) hands. Do you think that if our mothers acknowledged their nationality; that is, if they were brought up nationally, we would have so many renegades, who throw mud at their own nations? We must put this firm foundation into our daughters' hearts, the consciousness that they are Czechs; that they are Slavs... For they themselves will become mothers, and as such have the whole younger generation in their hands.



Now let us consider town girls, and then the children of poor parents, who would gladly send their children to school, but have no reason to. They send them to schools where they learn to read a bit in German, write, count if they have to; they go to sewing classes, dress up in their best clothes, and then enter Czech life saying that they are already educated. The real spiritual side of the nation, Czech national literature, remains closed to them because they have not even learnt to read in their native language - and what they have learnt in German they have forgotten because they have never needed it... All this is the reason why woman stands so far below men, why a man cannot have a conversation with her on things which fall outside the scope of the most ordinary domestic life.

... Believe us, dear sisters, who feel these inadequacies as much as we do, the state of affairs which we found has affected and grieved us so much that we want nothing more than to work - according to our modest strength and with your help - to make it otherwise. The nearest and most necessary means is of course the foundation of a Czech national gymnasium for the female sex."<sup>39</sup>

The society's first task was to persuade people to contribute money to it so that it could start the school. This was where Zapová was an asset because she was impeccably respectable and could use her connections to advantage. Meanwhile the women worked on the statutes of the society, which were finally ready in December 1848, although nearly a year elapsed before they were officially approved. But rivalries among the leaders were already beginning to become apparent. At the end of 1848 Amerlingová got herself elected president instead of Fričová; Zapová briefly tried to open her own school independent of the society. These cracks were papered over at the beginning of 1849 when Fričová resigned because of ill health, but the history of the society after this is one of slow decline. The women who could really contribute something to it were mistrustful of Amerlingová's leadership and stopped coming to meetings. The women

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39. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

who remained were, according to Zapová,<sup>40</sup> old-fashioned and ignorant, prejudiced against her because she was a Pole, and willing to let Amerlingova do what she wanted with the society. The school was eventually established in November 1849 but it was not independent, simply Amerlingová's pre-existing school put under the protection of the society.

Both Němcová and Rajská had been critical of the way things were developing for some time. At the beginning they had been enthusiastic, willing to help if they could, but by February 1849 Němcová was writing to Rajská to say that it looked as if the whole enterprise would fail. She tended to blame the participants for this:

"But you know these ladies of ours - or perhaps you don't, for you have believed what they said and judged them by your own standards. I know them better; they have only trifled with patriotism, they have hung out this pretext to disguise their limitless vanity, desire for fame, and selfishness... They believe that if they hang out the Slav tricolour, give themselves a Czech name, and learn to debate a bit better in Czech than refined young ladies can, all Czechs must bow down before such awesome patriotism, and when this doesn't happen they are immediately offended. Many of them think that when they have read two pages of Czech history, when they know when to write 'y' after a letter, where Prague is, when they can tell nettles from parsley, perform an unsuccessful experiment, when they can tell if potatoes are cooked, they have learning enough and to spare, and can become teachers immediately. Do not think that I am speaking from spite. God save me, I am not angry with anyone on my own account, but I am angry with them because they will harm a good cause with their frivolity and backbiting. That Society of Slav Women is like the Národní Obrana; there everyone wants to be an officer and nobody wants to be a private, and here every woman wants to be president without any problems."<sup>41</sup>

Rajská agreed with this criticism; reports she had heard from other sources bore it out, but she was inclined to blame the lack of

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40. Ibid., pp. 383-4, quoting H. Zapová - A. Marek, 5 September 1849.

41. Ibid., pp. 378-9, quoting Němcová-Rajská, 16 February 1849.

system and organisation within the society rather than the characters of the people involved. The more enthusiastic women on the committee were in fact hoping that with her return to Prague at the end of 1849 Rajska would be able to breathe new life into the society, but she was already too ill to be able to participate in anything.

The Society of Slav Women failed to set up an independent school because of internal disagreement, but the increasing level of political repression after 1849 did not make their task any easier. This is probably why only the school ever became a reality; the reading circle and the journal remained suggestions. Despite the political atmosphere, the schools which had been set up by women to educate small numbers of girls lingered on into the 1850s. They were so small that they could not be much of a threat, and one imagines that without the atmosphere of nationalist enthusiasm which produced them they would hardly have been very subversive.

Indeed, there was very little opportunity to subvert the Austrian government during that decade. The iron hand of the autocracy was evident everywhere. Government was much more centralised, so that no political autonomy remained to the provinces. New and closer links between state and church after the Concordat of 1855 underlined the dominance of clerical ideology. Any expressions of national feeling were firmly crushed and those institutions, for example, the National Museum, which had been instrumental in the development of the Czech national revival were put in charge of placemen who could be guaranteed not to do anything to embarrass the government. The Czechs were not only crushed by the administration but by the enforced silence of most of their national leaders. Some were abroad,



others were in prison; most, however, avoided these fates only by being on their best behaviour.

With the fall of Bach in August 1859, autocratic pressure was considerably weakened. The summoning of the enlarged Reichsrat in March 1860 portended a change in direction, realised by the October Diploma, in which the Emperor abandoned absolutism and laid the foundations for a constitution in which the principal legislative bodies would be the provincial Diets. This promise of increased autonomy for Bohemia was quickly withdrawn by the February Patent, and Czech politicians spent the rest of the 1860s trying to work out what their policy towards Vienna should be; but the liberating effect of the change from absolutism to constitutional monarchy (however limited) must not be underestimated. The Czechs could now form a legitimate political party. Although, under the terms of the February Patent, they were inadequately represented at Vienna as a nation, they could nevertheless begin to prosecute their interests as against the Germans', and, indeed, define what these interests were. Political discussion flourished, and there was a simultaneous cultural revival. Numerous non-political societies were formed for singing and gymnastics in Prague and throughout Bohemia; Czech journalism flourished. Národní listy, established in 1861, soon achieved a substantial readership and many weekly magazines and provincial papers were founded. In 1863 the "Umelecka beseda" was set up to support and further national culture by setting up libraries, reading rooms and a journal. The influence of this cultural revival penetrated everywhere; no small town was complete without its complement of singing societies, gymnastic associations, libraries and visits from nationalist amateur dramatic groups.



Women were also carried away on this wave of national enthusiasm. Special women's singing, educational and gymnastic clubs were founded. Women were as ready for a change as society in general and welcomed new ideas and the opportunity of political activity. "Feminist" ideas, comparable to those which were circulating in England and America at the same time, had hardly begun to penetrate to the Bohemian Lands and did not do so until the 1890s. The women who expressed their dissatisfaction now had no framework of ideas in which to place it, only the familiar phrases about women's place in the national struggle; and so it is not surprising that the forms of activity which they adopted tended to correspond to those which had been popular before 1848, but on a bigger scale. One can, however, see that those efforts bore a very close resemblance to early feminist efforts in other countries - Czech women simply justified them in terms of women's contribution to the national movement. As before - and as elsewhere - the main emphasis was on education; practical Czech education first of all to replace German "refinement". But the type and extent of education which women now demanded became more varied. Middle class women began to demand an outlet for their intellectual energies and frustrations; elsewhere, the economic pressures of the mid 19th century were beginning to make themselves felt. The problem of "surplus women" - middle class women who had no hope of finding a man to provide for them but were unable to provide adequately for themselves - emerged or was discovered, and required a practical solution - professional education. And of course the problem of economic independence was not confined to middle class girls - working class girls did not suffer loss of status from earning their own living but the amount they could earn was pathetically inadequate. It was acknowledged that

they also needed an opportunity to improve their qualifications.

To a certain extent during the 1860's one can see that women were not content to subordinate all their aspirations to a nationalist goal. The atmosphere of the decade; the cultural and political revival and diversification, prompted women of all kinds to express their demands. The aspirations of intellectual middle class women to improve themselves in order to escape from the ghetto of 'femininity' were given a boost in the early 1860's by a man called Vojta Náprstek. Náprstek was an exile from 1848 who had gone to America and had returned to Bohemia when the political situation made it possible. On his way home he had visited the London Exhibition of 1861: once back in Prague he organised a series of lectures on the subject.

Originally the lectures were intended merely to accompany a simultaneous exhibition of the latest machines from Western Europe, to introduce the Czech public to the idea of founding something like the British Science Museum. Many of these new machines were labour-saving devices; for instance, a sewing machine and a carpet sweeper. Náprstek was certainly not unaware of the interest which these might possess for women, who were admitted free to the lectures, but he must have been overwhelmed by the response. So many women attended the lectures that he began to organise special lectures for them, illustrating these labour-saving devices and expanding on their importance on liberating women for higher things. With the time saved from housework, (Náprstek reckoned that the average woman spent four hours a day on it), women could devote themselves to literature, education, and - following the example of their sisters in

England and North America - to feminism. While in England, Náprstek had made the acquaintance of the editors of the Englishwomen's Journal, an enterprise which he hoped Czech women would emulate. He argued that women were not inferior to men, and that these machines would give them a chance to prove it:

"A woman certainly has as much talent as a man; why should she not take part in the higher things of life if human ingenuity frees her from menial tasks? So much is talked about the upbringing and education of young people - well, let women devote themselves to it to a greater extent. People talk about the poverty of literature and art, and so on; well, let women try to leave their mark in this field as well."<sup>42</sup>

In his later lectures, which attracted about 1,500 women, Náprstek talked about women's employment; the need to recognise the problem posed by surplus women and answer it constructively. Again he was full of praise for the way the English and Americans had done this.

The lectures caused a minor sensation. During December 1862 and January 1863 they were reported on the front page of Národní listy every time they took place; and with many approving comments like this:

"These lectures should prove that our society, and in particular the fair sex has a feeling for things other than amusement, balls, concerts, social evenings; for things which pave the way for progress, for more advanced views and opinions, which elevate public and domestic life, which liberate the human spirit from its restricting bonds and which, finally, save time, work and capital, assist health and increase prosperity."<sup>43</sup>

Not all response was as favourable as this, but women certainly seem to have been particularly enthusiastic. As a direct result of the lectures a number of women including the writer Karolina Světlá

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42. Národní listy, 6 January 1863.

43. Národní listy, 22 December 1862.



began to meet informally to discuss the woman question. They wrote to Náprstek to say how much they admired and agreed with what he was saying:

"You, sir, have the honour of being the first man in our nation to feel for our poverty; for it is poverty when a dressmaker dies of hunger despite all her hard work; it is poverty when a mother is forced to neglect her children in order to go out to work; it is poverty if a girl is brought up only to catch a man and marries only because she will not otherwise be provided for; it is poverty when a woman feels she has talent yet has to repress it because society is unable and unwilling to make use of it. We have felt this poverty deeply and we have had to be silent, we have mourned it only in private; every woman who expressed her opinions angrily has been called unwomanly and people have assumed she wants liberty, to be free of her sacred responsibilities, so that she can indulge her selfish wishes.

You, sir, were the first to say to us, 'Be active, we will share the treasures of science, art and industry with you, compete with us and we will be glad if you can catch us up by your own efforts. Hitherto you have been idle, for it is idleness when a person does something which bears no relationship to the time expended on it.'

Yes, we have been idle and in this spiritual idleness our characters have become deformed. It is these deformations which you so cruelly criticise and by which you judge that we are not capable of progress and are not your equals. We have been excluded from all higher human interests and cast back upon ourselves and our narrow domestic circle - and thus we are still vain and petty, our talents have been forcibly repressed and we have never dared to show them - thus we have learnt to lie and conceal, our activity has been restricted and our active spirit has found something else to do - intrigue and coquettishness. Who can count the victims of these two demons, the saddest and most pernicious consequences of our upbringing.?!"<sup>44</sup>

Náprstek welcomed and encouraged these aspirations. At his suggestion an educational club was formed which opened in January 1865

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44. Karolina Světlá - Vojta Náprstek, January 1863, reprinted in, Polemika s dobou. Karolina Světlá ve vzpomínkách a korespondence současníků, (Prague 1969), pp. 70-72.



at his house. He lent them his library for their meetings and put all the books he possessed on the women question at their disposal. It was called the 'American Ladies' Club', reflecting the Czech veneration of America as the cradle of everything modern and advanced, including women's emancipation.<sup>45</sup> The statutes of the club laid down its aims and the means which should be used to achieve them. The aims included the education of club members, charity, care of the young, and praising the memory of famous women; the means lectures, exhibitions, visits and publishing work. There was no subscription, though members were expected to contribute to charities and support charitable work.<sup>46</sup>

In the winter the club organised lectures on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and in the summer it arranged excursions to places of interest. Lectures covered a wide variety of topics; they were generally educational rather than feminist in content and were usually given by experts in the subject; university professors, for example.<sup>47</sup> The audience was mostly female - men could come to the lectures but had to sit in an adjoining room with the doors open. (They were

45. The emphasis on ladies (dámy) rather than women (ženy) is perhaps worth noting.

46. Stanovy amerického klubu dám. Náprstkovo muzeum: Americký klub dám.3. (1965-8).

47. For example, among the lectures given: Dr. Albin Brať lectured on socialism and on economics. Professor Josef Durdík gave 49 lectures on 'What is idealism?' Professor Dr. Jaroslav Goll lectured on Anne of Luxemburg, Dr. Edmund Kaizl on Florence Nightingale, Professor Dr. Jaromír Kosut on the life of the poets at the court of Haroun al Rasid. Professor Dr. Fr. Studníčka gave 25 lectures on astronomy, and Jaroslav Vrchlický gave 15 lectures in all on Dante, Michelangelo and Victor Hugo. Women also gave lectures - Sofie Podlipská gave 29 and Venceslava Lužická Srbová and Anna Bayerová were some of the other women who spoke. (Kodym, Dům "U Halánků", pp. 75-8).

allowed to participate in the summer expeditions, though.)<sup>48</sup>

Charitable activity was an important component of feminist commitment in those days, and the club supported a wide number of charities. Náprstek's particular interest was children, and the club followed this, organising fetes for poor children, country holidays, playgrounds and the like.

Apart from the educational value of its lectures and its charitable activities, the importance of the American Ladies' Club for the historian of the feminist movement really lies in its function as a meeting place for women and men who were interested in women's emancipation. Until the foundation of the Czech Women's Club in 1905 it provided the only place where feminists could meet socially. It had a large library of international books and periodicals on the woman question and women could go there to read at any time of the day. Everyone, no matter what their political views, went there at one time or another; for example, Karla Máchová, the Social Democrat leader was an enthusiastic member of the club. She not only attended the lectures, where she met and made friends with Charlotte Masaryková but was also very involved in organising entertainments for poor children under Náprstek's patronage.<sup>49</sup> The struggle for women's emancipation also received a good deal of support from Náprstek personally and from the club. Anna Bayerová, the first Czech woman doctor, owed a great deal to him for his encouragement of her aspirations, he supported the Ženský Výrobní Spolek Český and helped Eliška Krásnohorská to found the first girls' gymnasium.

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48. S. Kodym, Dům "U Halánků", (Prague 1958), pp. 74-79.

49. AUD KSC: Karla Máchová, Denník z mého života.



While these women were giving expression to their intellectual frustrations, others were participating in the wave of popular agitation which swept the Bohemian Lands at the end of the 1860's. From 1868 - 71 hundreds of open air meetings, (tábory) were organised, attended in all by many hundreds of thousands of people. They were an expression of the profound disillusion of the Czechs with the direction taken by the Austrian Government, symbolised by the agreement with Hungary of 1867. The Czechs had responded to this by seeking to create new alignments for themselves outside the framework of the Monarchy, with Russia; on a popular level, the summer of 1868 had been marked by several huge nationalist demonstrations - the laying of the foundation stone of the National Theatre, the celebrations in memory of Jan Hus. The tábory began as spontaneous, individual demonstrations though under the guidance of a Young Czech society, Slovanská Lípa, named after the nationalist society which had been active in 1848), they soon became more organised. They were concentrated first in the years 1868 - 69: after the failure of Czech/German negotiations in 1871 there was another wave.

The prevailing tone of the tábory was nationalist and democratic. The participants demanded autonomy for the Bohemian Lands. Some suggested that they be granted the same status as Hungary; others phrased the demand in terms of the recognition of historic state rights. Within a Bohemia organised on this basis people wanted a Diet elected by universal suffrage and a truly popular administration. Sometimes the demand for universal suffrage went as far as specifying universal suffrage without distinction of sex. Demands for autonomy had a strong economic motive. People objected to paying taxes to the central government which they thought benefitted German industry.

They wanted to see agriculture and industry within the Bohemian Lands supported and encouraged and the Diets given the right to levy taxes. One of the interesting aspects of the tábor movement is the diversity of interests which it reflected. The demands made related not only to the political and economic organisation of the province, but also the provision of Czech education and the formation of economic, educational and workers' clubs; many tábory also demanded the abolition of the standing army and the introduction of a people's militia.

Women definitely participated in the tábory in substantial numbers. At least one tábor demanded women's suffrage; another demanded education for women<sup>50</sup> - both ideas which women themselves had hardly begun to formulate at the time. One tábor, on 20 September 1868, seem to have composed entirely of women (described by one observer as "wild women from the hills") who beat up a local official who attempted to intervene.<sup>51</sup> The wide base of participation was generally used as a justification for the movement, showing that it was truly democratic and national:

"The best thing about our tábory is precisely that they are attended by the people, not just the intelligentsia; that they are attended even by women and children. In this way political education is extended into circles into which it would not otherwise have penetrated, even in a hundred years. In this way the political movement takes on the same form and strength which once the religious movement had during the Hussite wars. We are always laughed at on this account, because peasants, women and children read the Bible and discussed religion."<sup>52</sup>

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50. The tábor which demanded universal suffrage took place at Roudnice on 30 June 1871; that which demanded education for women in Podhrad u Chocně, 18 July 1869. (Přehled československých dějin: Prague 1960, pp. 411; 395).

51. Antal Stašek, Vzpomínky, (Prague 1925), p. 264.

52. Národní listy, 1 August 1869.



It is clear that, unlike their educational aspirations, women's participation in the tabory was hardly self-conscious. It reflected rather the level of national consciousness at this point so that the demands which were made by this national democratic movement could be attractive to women as well; women could see that their involvement in politics, if not expected, was at least welcomed rather than deplored.

As it turned out, however, the 1860's were merely an interlude; the hopes that they had encouraged were dashed. Initially the Czechs saw the issue in terms of German opposition to Czech independence; as the decade wore on, however, political circles became divided over the policy of passive resistance which had been adopted as a token of non-co-operation with the government. Their reasons for failure could no longer be attributed to unsympathetic higher powers but must be sought within the national movement itself.

One can see this abrupt decline in nationalist enthusiasm faintly reflected in the development - or failure to develop - of the women's movement. The end of spontaneous political demonstrations meant the end of women's participation in more or less the only form of political activity which was open to them. Although there was a long way to go before women found a political voice, it is surely not insignificant that they began to do so at a time of similar political upheaval, in the 1890's. The women's movement - if you can call it that - which emerged in the 1870's reflected the atmosphere of the period. The anger and frustration voiced by Karolina Světlá in her letter to Náprstek had led to the formation of the American Ladies' Club but the impulse had not gone any further and the Club remained

almost alone in its field for thirty years. Women in the 1870's and 1880's concentrated primarily on helping others rather than themselves, even though they were often motivated by traditional feminist considerations like the need for girls to have a proper education.

The activities which they chose to pursue were still largely dictated by the expectations of the nationalist movement, the boundaries within which women's interests were deemed to fall - education and upbringing.

#### Marie Riegrova and nationalist nursery education

The upbringing of children had always been seen as the natural sphere for woman as mother to exercise her motherly influence in a nationalist direction, but the idea of undertaking nationalist upbringing on a large scale had never really been considered. Yet there was obviously great scope for such a project. The main target of theories of nationalist education was always the parent, usually the middle class parents who brought their children up in the belief that German was refined. But implicit criticism of neglectful parents could also be extended to the growing industrial working class in families where both parents worked outside the home and the children received inadequate care, if any. It was clearly to the advantage of the nationalist movement to win families like this over to support the nationalist cause or at least to make sure that their children were educated 'correctly'. On the more practical level it was equally clear that mothers needed somewhere to put their children while they were at work or if they were too busy looking after a large family. Some provision for young children was therefore desirable.



The woman who took up this cause, Marie Riegrová, had impeccable nationalist credentials, the daughter of one national leader - Palacký - and married to another - Rieger. Her interest in nursery education came from a long interest in charitable work and the position of women.<sup>53</sup> She was first of all involved in the Society of St Ludmila. This was one of the earliest women's charitable societies, founded in 1851 to support poor widows and teach girls to sew. By 1865, when Riegrová became a member, it had declined, and she decided to inject new life into by setting up an "industrial school", (průmyslová škola) which would teach working class girls new skills so that they would be able to earn their own living.<sup>54</sup> However, this plan was not an unmixed success,<sup>55</sup> and after the end of the 1860's her attention centred mainly on child-care. Even while she had been involved on the industrial school Riegrová had been anxious to delimit for women a sphere in which they could work without being threatened by competition from men. She was worried, for instance, that even sewing, a traditional female preserve, was being taken over by men working in factories and thought that women should acquire the necessary skills in order to win back the right to do this kind of thing. Such was the case with child-care. She was afraid that, except as far as individual families were concerned, the control of child-care was increasingly passing into the hands of men and that women were employed in nurseries and

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53. She had started a short-lived women's educational circle in 1859, and became interested in charitable work by helping Náprstek compile some lectures on women's charitable work in Europe. (K. Štloukal, *Z ženy z rodiny Palackého*, in, Královny, kněžny a velké ženy české, (Prague 1940), p. 410.

54. Ibid., p. 411.

55. Men proved to be very opposed to skilled competition from women, and it was difficult to find these skilled girls jobs. (M. Červinková Riegrová, Marie Riegrová, rodem Palacká, její život a skutky, (Prague 1893), pp. 45-57).



orphanages only in a subordinate capacity. This, she thought, was against nature; it was women's right to be able to bring up children and it was, of course, what they were best at doing.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, within the sphere of nursery education women's role as national educator could be amply fulfilled. Working class children could be brought up in a Czech way, and they could also be brought up to respect the middle class values of those who educated them.<sup>57</sup>

In looking to nursery schools and creches as a valuable source of national education Riegrová was doing nothing new: the first Czech nursery school, which intentionally combined a Czech speaking environment with novel educational methods had been opened in Prague by František Swoboda in 1832.<sup>58</sup> Prague Germans were also well aware of the value of 'catching them young' and had begun to open kindergartens in the 1850's. The concern to establish Czech child-care was in part a reaction to this.

There were three types of institution which could be set up for pre-school age children; the kindergarten, the nursery and the opatrovna. Kindergartens had two disadvantages as far as Riegrová was concerned. They were not open all day, and were thus unsuitable for the group which needed them most - working mothers - and they were

56. Ibid., p. 71.

57. As her daughter said: "What she desired was not just an educational institution. - she desired above all a charitable establishment for the suffering children of the poor, a healthy refuge, in which the better air would revive them and nourishing food would strengthen them; in which they would flourish morally under the loving eye of a woman - a woman who taught them and protected them with charitable care." Ibid., p. 71.

58. This was the institution which so influenced Amerling. Its educational progressiveness consisted mainly in that it placed emphasis on exercise and fresh air. B. Ledvínková, Nástin vývoje opatroven, školek a mateřských škol, (Prague 1888).

German, and were thus incompatible with Czech educational traditions.<sup>59</sup>

The difference between a nursery and opatrovna was really a class difference. The opatrovna was for working class children, in the words of the law; "to keep them suitably occupied, accustom them to cleanliness, order and good behaviour, and awaken in them a love of work."<sup>60</sup> Whereas the institutions that Riegrová favoured were technically opatrovny in that they catered for working class children, they conformed more to the idea of a nursery school with their stress on learning through play, and physical exercise.<sup>61</sup>

Riegrová got a chance to put her ideas into practice in 1869. Prague city council was planning to open a new opatrovna, and she managed to persuade them to give her control of it. The council paid for two women to go to France and Germany to study methods there; they were especially impressed with the ideas of Marie Pape Carpentier in France, and when they returned they tried to run the opatrovna by these methods and those of Swoboda,<sup>62</sup> thus combining educational progressiveness with nationalism. The administration of the opatrovna was overseen by a committee of ladies which decided which children should be admitted, visited families and made notes on every case.

In 1875 the ladies' committee, in co-operation with the council, decided to open more of these schools; by 1890 there were sixteen of

59. M. Riegrová, Na obranu městským opatrovnám a školkam mateřským  
MSS in ANM: Riegrová 13/4.

60. Quoted in B. Ledvínková.

61. M. Riegrová, Na obranu ...

62. Ibid.



them and they had clothed and fed nearly nineteen thousand children.<sup>63</sup> But her experience with nursery schools still left Riegrová unsatisfied. Nursery schools improved the health of poor children, as well as putting them on the right lines, but the infant mortality rate in the inner city of Prague was very high and many children died before they reached the age of three, when they could be admitted to nursery school. In 1883, therefore, the committee started to open creches for babies under three. By 1890 they were catering for about four hundred children a year.<sup>64</sup>

Once the correct values had been instilled into these children they could be abandoned to the state educational system - or no education at all. The women who had been so concerned about their early youth were not very interested in improving their prospects in later life, even if they were girls. For them the fundamental point was that working class girls could not lose status by working. Middle class girls, however, were differently placed. The restraints imposed on them by gentility and class expectations left them with an education which was wholly inadequate to their real position in life. They were educated to be refined, and refinement was synonymous with German-ness. They were usually forced to speak German so that they forgot their Czech, and were then provided with a smattering of feminine accomplishments, as Karolína Světlá recalled:

"No attention was devoted to the basic (literární) education of girls. Fluent French conversation, a dexterity in playing the piano, proficiency in decorative needlework; that was all that was required of a well-educated girl."<sup>65</sup>

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63. M. Červinková Riegrová, Marie Riegrová, p. 117.

64. ANM:Riegrová, 14. Výroční zpráva o školách mateřských Jesle: Zpráva z r 1890.

65. K. Světlá, Z literárního soukromí (Sebrané spisy, Prague 1941), XXVII, p. 10.



These were the qualities, fond parents hoped, which would attract a husband. Their daughter would then be provided for. The idea that girls might have to support themselves was unmentionable, but it was an increasingly obvious fact of life that a large number of such girls did not marry, could not find a man to support them and so were cast upon their own extremely meagre resources. Statistics about the surplus of the female population over the male were common fare in contemporary journals and newspapers, and the problem which they posed obtruded on the notice of people in all European countries in the middle of the nineteenth century. There was one obvious solution; to provide an education whereby these women could obtain a skill or qualification which would enable them to get a better job, instead of the inevitable governessing or sewing, and which would give them a standing in the labour market equal to their standing in society. Work had to be made respectable, and it also had to be made possible for these girls to get respectable jobs.

As a successful writer Karolína Světlá was in a position to observe the miserable position of such girls in her own society. They wrote to her and asked advice about how to earn money respectably with no qualifications: often they hoped to become writers and sent their work to her for criticism. In an essay written in 1867, 'On the upbringing of woman',<sup>66</sup> Světlá tried to present the plight of surplus women, as she saw it, to the Czech public. Formerly, she argued, unmarried daughters had been kept busy working around the house, but now technological advance, particularly the invention of the sewing

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66. K. Světlá "O výchování ženy" in, Z literárního soukromí.

machine, meant that there was nothing for them to do. Fathers were finding it an increasing burden to keep these girls in idleness, but social expectations led them to see this as inevitable and the education the girls had received did not fit them to earn their own living. At least working class girls were not so incapable; they knew how to keep themselves. Světlá opposed the idea that education for girls was unseemly, and she disagreed with any educational schemes which would just aim to make women better mothers. Education for independence, she thought, was the only guarantee of a woman's happiness, for only a self-supporting woman could really make a free choice in marriage.

It was in order to put forward ideas like these to a wider audience that Světlá helped to found the Ženský Výrobní Spolek Český (Women's Czech Industrial Society) in 1871. The aim of the society was to found a school where girls could acquire practical skills and study ordinary academic subjects at a moderate cost. The school was started in September 1871. It was divided into several departments; sewing, drawing, commercial subjects and languages. Most courses lasted two years; there was a small charge which could be waived at the school's discretion (which seems to have happened in a large number of cases). The fact that the school filled a long-felt need can be seen from its success. Within ten years it had six hundred pupils.<sup>67</sup>

Some financial contribution to the upkeep of the school was made by Prague city council, but quite a large part was provided by

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67. Ženské listy, 1886.



contributions from members of the society and school fees. Support from outside sources was of course dependent on maintaining good will, which was not always easy. The society often had to rely on individual well-wishers on the council like Vojta Náprstek to make sure that the grant was renewed each year.

The Society and its school made a substantial contribution to the development of the Czech women's movement. It was the first such society to extend its influence much beyond Prague; it had a central organisation in Prague and then a network of collectors all over the province who enrolled new members and collected the all-important subscriptions. Although the active membership was small, passive membership was about three thousand,<sup>68</sup> thus making it the largest women's organisation in the Bohemian Lands before 1914. The society took its leading role in the women's movement quite seriously; it employed women teachers where it could and agitated on issues affecting women and their education; for example, equal rights for women teachers, equal access for women to secondary, and higher education. It also took over and supported a monthly women's journal Ženské listy, edited first by Karolína Světlá and then by Eliška Krásnohorská, also a writer and a feminist. This kept the society's members up to date with the doings of the school and published information on women's emancipation all over the world, as well as instructive articles or belles lettres relating to or written by Czech women.<sup>69</sup>

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68. Přehled ženských spolků (Prague, Ženský výrobní spolek český, 1891).

69. Ženské listy was much more than the paper of the Výrobní spolek; it was the first Czech women's journal, with no competitors till 1892.



The aim of the school was, however, clearly charitable.

Those who enrolled in full time classes were girls from lower middle class backgrounds who needed to make a living. The school soon got a reputation as the best place to get your staff from, and those who ran it were proud of this.<sup>70</sup> It was only when there were few rivals in the field that it could have any academic pretensions; as soon as ordinary girls' schools began to be founded it cost much of its importance. As a response to the problem of surplus women it was only partially successful, because it did little to enable women to get jobs of masculine status. Although it campaigned for women's rights it did not give its pupils the opportunity to escape from the feminine trap, and the skills it taught them were menial. The girls who passed through the school were not conscious of themselves as pioneers, and the experience certainly did not turn them into feminists. For the ambitious, aware girl there were even at that time other avenues to advancement; such as teacher training.

### Literature

Women's aspirations throughout this period were reflected also in literature. Those women who were most prominent in seeking education and enlightenment for themselves and their sex were frequently writers. Writing was a respectable independent pursuit and one of the few which they were able to adopt. In it they could voice their opinions on the position of women, the state of the nationalist movement, and offer programmes for the future and picture of an ideal society.

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70. Irena Malinská, Korespondence Elišky Krašňohorské s Jindřiškou Flajšhansovou, unpublished paper, (Prague 1955).

There are three major women writers whose works span this period who were closely connected with the women's movement or with the propagation of ideas about the position of women in society - Božena Němcová, Karolína Světlá and Eliška Krásnohorská. Individually and artistically they had little in common, although they were united in the eyes of their contemporaries and of succeeding generations by the commitment to women's emancipation which they demonstrated.

Božena Němcová was frequently presented by later feminists as the first great feminist of the Czech literary scene. In fact, however, her feminism is visible primarily in her journalistic work and her letters; in her novels her approach to the problem of women is less easy to define. There is a definite duality in her work; a conflict between her own life and experience and the hopes and fears expressed in her fiction. Her non-fiction work and letters form quite a large part of her total output; for example, her studies of the Czech people and their national customs, undertaken while following her husband round the Monarchy began a tradition among novelists of basing novels of country life on a substantial knowledge of the area, its speech and customs. Karolína Světlá and Tereza Nováková were two important women novelists who perpetuated this tradition. When she was dealing with real life, therefore, Němcová had a realistic and critical view of the subjects she wrote about; we have already seen what she thought of most women's patriotic efforts in 1848. She was extremely critical of middle class feminine gentility, be it Czech or German, and saw no solution for womanhood or the nation in that kind of activity, but in her descriptions of country life she was equally certain that a return to a golden age was no solution for women.



Němcová was also realistic about what one could expect from personal relationships, as in her advice to Rajská about whether or not to marry Čelakovský. She herself went through a long unhappy marriage before eventually parting from her husband, and was frowned upon by polite society for her affairs and her relaxed way of life. She had little reason, therefore, to be sentimental about relationships between men and women.

In her literary work, however, the realism arrived at both by reflection and experience tended to be superseded by an idealistic view of personal and class relationships and of the nature of the village life on which her creative energies were focussed. In both Babička, (1855) and Pohorská vesnice (1856) rural life is almost entirely harmonious; there are a few individuals who do not fit in, but they are only individuals, and the general picture is one of happy co-existence. Nasty things do happen - people have tragic lives and meet unhappy ends - but they happen outside the spatial and temporal framework and thus do not really impinge on the basic happiness of the main characters. An important feature of this co-existence in both books is the presence of a local noble family who do all they can to make their subjects happy and foster an atmosphere where class divisions are accepted as natural; members of each social class have a responsibility to the members of other classes and fulfil it gladly. The countess in Pohorská vesnice and her family could never really understand what it was like to be poor, but:

"... in their hearts there was a real love of God and their neighbour: their religion was not an empty phrase. They performed the duties of their class conscientiously and gladly."<sup>71</sup>

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71. Božena Němcová, Pohorská vesnice, (Prague 1928), p. 91.



The same is true of the countess and her ward in Babička, who also perform the duties of their class in a humble and unobtrusive way. The actions of both of these pairs of enlightened aristocrats actually have a specific bearing on the development of the story. The countess in Babička intervenes in the romance between Kristla and Mila, buying Mila out of the army and thus re-uniting the two lovers; in Pohorská vesnice they change the direction of the hero's life by enabling him to educate himself. They are real friends of the country people, always readier to associate with them than with affected insensitive members of their own class. This picture of nationally-inspired class harmony corresponded to Němcová's experience of the Kolovrat family, but she recognised that they were exceptional. To assume that other families were like them was to romanticise the role of the nobility.

Idealistic, too, is the view of women and particularly women of the people, which Němcová puts forward. Although in her journalistic descriptions of village life she emphasised the blinding ignorance of village women this is more or less passed over in her fiction, where the happiest women are those who, like Babička, while having no formal education have a strong basis of religious superstition and country lore to carry them through any situation. The role of women as expounded, for example, by the Countess in Pohorská vesnice is rather different from what Němcová envisages elsewhere. Women are certainly ignorant, the Countess declares, but that is because they have been mis-educated. Whereas previously they filled their time with domestic work and sought happiness only within the household, now these simple things are too good for them. Women should be educated to a proper understanding of their importance as women:

"Until woman is conscious of the high position and role which God has assigned to her in putting the entire good of the future in her hands, man is building his house on sandy ground. If his building is to succeed, woman must be his collaborator. Woman must be raised to the ruler's throne, alongside man, not in order to judge or punish, but to be an angel of conciliation between him and the world. God put into woman's hands the palm of faith and the fount of love, so that she could carry it before man when he enters the battle of the spirit... Woman must return the lost paradise to humankind."<sup>72</sup>

This is a romantic view of the all-conquering power of femininity.

Nothing so prosaic as education is needed to accomplish equality.

It is significant also that deliberations on the nature of the female sex are the prerogative of people like the countess, who can judge these national and social changes from the outside, rather than those who are meant to be participating in them. Moreover, the fate which Němcová decreed for these women was very different from that which she wanted for women like herself; her idealism extended only to the lower classes, while she was above the rules she laid down for women. She seemed to believe that she was in a position to be able to tell others what to do and to be an outside observer like some of her characters. One cannot interpret her idealistic treatment of village life as a way of escaping from her own cruel reality, because she always implicitly set herself apart from it; she herself had no intention of living up to these expectations.

Embodied in Pohorská vesnice and Babička - especially Babička - are a great many clichés of the Romantic era, which Němcová did a great deal to perpetuate in Czech nationalist thought. The country,

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72. Ibid., p. 100.



and simple country people, are demonstrated to be better than the town; the Czech past is seen to be better than the Germanised present. Babicka herself, of course, represents this past. Her influence on her children and grandchildren and on the whole village show what the past can contribute to the present, if only people are not too sophisticated to accept it.

The writer whose name is often linked with Němcová's in terms of feminism is Karolína Světlá, but in fact Světlá's debt to Němcová can be seen rather in the similar approach to writing about the people, the detailed research into places and customs which is evident in her later work. Světlá was much more of a feminist in her literature than Němcová had ever been; her work carries a much stronger conviction about women's place in society than Němcová's and, at the same time, she manages to set them in the milieu which Němcová had also chosen, the Czech village. Apart from superficial similarities in the choice of setting, however, their literary approaches are completely different. In Světlá's world events are not helped on their way by the divine intervention of the local aristocracy. Her female characters act out the ideas of their creator; they are strong and control the destinies of men. Světlá began to write novels as a form of therapy following the death of her only child; a particularly far-sighted doctor realised that the inactivity expected of women of her class could do her no good at all. So from the very beginning her literary activity was an act of rebellion against middle class feminine gentility and the lack of national consciousness which this usually brought in its train.



Světla was brought up to be a German young lady, and she had first hand experience of the crippling effect a 'young lady's' education could have on any creative impulse. Even writing was considered unsuitable, and likely to make it difficult for her to get a husband. Her first published works were set in this milieu and expressed her anger against it; they told of girls who suddenly realised that there was more to life than parties, clothes and hoping to get married, and that their real responsibility was to do something to further the national cause. The idea of awakening women to their real responsibilities to the nation was hardly new, and in fact Světla's later novels try to express these ideas about women in a subtler, less programmatic way; not simply saying that middle class women had something to learn, but showing women from the people in situations where they are the ones in control.

Světla's interest in the people and in Czech national history had always been implicit ever since she rediscovered her own nationality. Soon after the death of their daughter her husband introduced her to the area around Ještěd in North Central Bohemia. Almost ten years later she began to put what she knew about this area, its people and customs into her novels. Nearly all the events described in such works as Vesnický roman, Nemodlenec, Kříž u potoka were based on stories that she had heard so that events which might have taken place were then woven into her own story and ideas. Through the novels she also tried to express the personal dilemmas which she faced in her own life.

Vesnický roman (1867) is based on such a combination of truth and experience. It tells of a poor but honest peasant (Antoš Jirovec) strongly influenced by a devout mother, who makes what turns out to be

a disastrous marriage when he is too young to know any better. His wife becomes increasingly difficult to live with and eventually he leaves her to make his own way in the world, rather than lay himself open to accusations that he is dependent on her money. He falls in love with another girl (Sylva), but the relationship is doomed. His mother will not tolerate his getting divorced for moral reasons, and his wife will stop at nothing to get her revenge on him. In Antoš's mind there are two conflicting influences at work, the moral uprightness of Jirovcová, his mother, who, though a widow, will not marry again because marriage is a sacrament which can only be entered into once, who brought him up to revere the memory of his father and to do nothing of which he might have disapproved, and the inescapable fact of an unhappy marriage:

"Who could make him live with her any longer, after what had happened? The law, which does not allow a man to desert his wife, even if she breaks faith with him or spends his money wantonly?

At that moment Antos realised how inadequate these laws were - they brutally put one person into the power of another and defend only his material rights and property. But what about the man whose spirit has been damaged, whose heart and peace of mind are being destroyed, where can he turn?"<sup>73</sup>

Antoš backs up these reflections on the cruelty of the institution of marriage with references to the system prevailing in a neighbouring town of Ochranov (in reality Herrnhut, a settlement of Moravian Brethren). Ochranov is organised on an egalitarian basis. Women are equal, divorce is possible, children are cared for by the community. It is to Ochranov that Antoš plans to take Sylva, so they can live together as man and wife. Světlá can thus contrast the

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73. Karolina Světlá, Vesnický roman, (Prague 1969), p. 66.



customs of what she and her contemporaries considered to be true Czech democracy with those of the present day. She shows that both Sylva and Antoš live by moral codes as admirable as Jirovcová's, although not as inflexible; they are adaptable to human demands. Once they have declared their feelings for each other neither can understand why anything should stand in their way. Antoš's marriage is patently at an end, and by her actions his wife has given up all rights over him and their children. However, several different forces combine to ensure that they shall never be happy together. Jirovcová's religious beliefs, her conviction that to marry again is a sin, and her power as a mother over her son force Antoš into a position where he abandons his plans to marry Sylva rather than infringe his mother's code. Sylva is forced to abandon the idea independently, because of Antoš's wife, whom she witnesses casting a spell on them both. The wife is passionately jealous of Antoš and wants to lure him back to her by any means possible, even black magic. Between them, therefore, these two women put an end to the relationship. Here, as in most of Svetla's other novels the women control and the men obey. The power - good or bad - which women are supposed to possess as wives, mothers and lovers here becomes the only force which guides human relationships; far more important than, for example, the economic power which Antoš possesses. His most important role in the economic sphere is seen to be that of 'good example' to the wicked horse traders with whom he competes. This is clearly a reversal of roles from the traditional novel, where men direct and women obey, but its significance also lies in the quality of women's power which it displays, moral and spiritual, rooted in family feeling and human emotions.



The conflict between the demands of right-thinking society, inflexible and self-evidently 'moral' and emotional inner truth was something Světlá herself experienced in her relationship with the poet Jan Neruda. On the one hand she recognised that the forces of family, friends and social acceptability were not to be trifled with; she declared that she was not interested in love, had no use for it - it was a jealous, selfish emotion. The emotion which she really valued was true friendship, though the way in which she phrased this was revealing:

"For my best work I have to thank the influence of friends, certainly not lovers and still less my husband..."<sup>74</sup>

But despite her insistence on this kind of relationship it was one which middle class morality would not permit her; she felt that these false standards weighed her down and that she was not acting of her own free will:

"I act sensibly, I am politic, careful, but in no way moral - despite my sexual purity; this I feel very keenly. I am protecting my husband from humanity, my parents from compassion, public opinion because of my profession and my name, that is, from astuteness, but there is no moral spark in my actions, please do not tell me the opposite. If I wanted to act morally I would take account of nothing and follow my emotions, which tell me unmistakably that I would light up a darkened soul and give my life meaning. I would save two souls, that is certain, and the world would undoubtedly be amazed at the treasures which they would endow it with from gratitude that it gave them life, but 'das ist das Los der Schönen auf Erden'; they will have to part sooner or later... and in order that the one can continue to reign on the throne of refined womanhood, remain an ideal and write bad novels, the other must stick in the nasty mess of our disordered social relations and drink the poison of our refined civilisation."<sup>75</sup>

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74. Karolína Světlá - Jan Neruda (no date), reprinted in Polemika s dobou, p. 135.  
 75. Karolína Světlá - Sofie Podlipská, 15 August 1862, reprinted in ibid., pp. 113-4.

She hoped that Neruda would be able to accept her on these terms, albeit with difficulty. His immediate reaction is interesting because he condemns her as female; that is, not totally human, in the same way as later critics were to judge her:

"Yes, you are an old maid in every sense, you do not know how to surrender yourself either physically or spiritually.. God, woman, what you could have been if only you did not have this false persistent shame; what might not have been born in your soul if only you had let somebody fertilise it!... I tell you quite seriously that with all your great talent you will remain one sided because you are exclusively female, and you allow no male influences to work on you..."<sup>76</sup>

Neruda might reproach her as much as he liked; Světlá was not going to let herself be drawn into a situation which would make life impossible for her. She really did believe in the value of friendship and what it could achieve, whereas Neruda hardly seemed to notice what she had done for him. She was resolved to remain an 'old maid', and not worry about the effect that this might have on the men she portrayed in her novels. The discovery of their correspondence in fact meant a premature end to their friendship and an end to any hopes Neruda might have had. Světlá could only put some of the feelings of conflict which the relationship had revealed into her literary work.

Thus her female characters; both Jirovcová and Sylva, for instance, display the moral unity and certainty which she had tried to possess. This may be a reflection of her own experience; it may also be an attempt at self-justification. In fiction, at least, the person who does the right thing can be seen to score a perceptible

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76. Ibid., p. 125.



moral victory. This emphasis on personal moral integrity, on having a philosophy of life and living according to its dictates is part of the difference between Světlá and Němcová. Němcová did not practise what she preached to other women - Světlá did. It is also an aspect of Světlá's feminist commitment. She was constantly dissatisfied with the position which, being a woman, she was expected to occupy in life. She always felt that, had she been a man, life would have been easier: she could have achieved something worthwhile. It is clear that her women characters act out this fantasy for her, for not only are they strong but they have ideas. Němcová, on the other hand, expressed no such concrete dissatisfaction. She railed at people who treated her badly because of her awkward social position; she was angry with those who denied to women access to the most basic sources of education, but she accepted what life had to offer her as a woman, and she certainly thought that other women not as exceptional as she should accept it and be glad.

The woman writer whose name springs immediately to mind when one thinks of nineteenth century feminism is Eliška Krásnohorská. She edited the first women's journal, Ženské listy, founded the first girls' gymnasium, and was the grande dame of the Czech women's movement until her death in 1925. She was an admirer and protegee of Světlá's,<sup>77</sup> and though her political activity was centred on feminism her literary work was nationalist in flavour. Krásnohorská had lived through many of the same experiences as Světlá in her youth; lack of proper education,

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77. Světlá got her the job of editor of Ženské listy so that she would have the financial security to write. "Eva Jurčinová, Eliška Krásnohorská" in, Královny kněžny a velké ženy české, p. 461.



a serious illness, and this gave the impetus to some of the feminist convictions - particularly of the need for girls to be able to earn their own living - which she attempted to realise throughout her life. However, in her poetry these convictions find only oblique expression. She did not use literature as a vehicle for her thoughts on the position of women as such, but as her personal weapon in the national struggle. As a woman writer she was descended more from the early patriotic women poets of the 1830's and 1840's than from Němcová and Světlá. In her work women's importance was chiefly understood within the narrow framework of the national struggle.

Her best literary work was probably produced at the beginning of her career; thereafter, the tendentious nationalist tones which were never far absent came to dominate it. Even in early collections of poetry - Ze Šumavy (1873), K slovanskému jihu (1880) - the theme of national struggle and oppression is ever present. Ze Šumavy is meant to be a set of poems with local colour from the Šumava area; most are written in a folksy style, using the local dialect, and nearly all touch directly on the idea that the Czechs are surrounded by foreigners. They will not surrender their land and their language without a struggle, and they will fight to free themselves from the foreign threat. K slovanskému jihu is a demonstration of the chord struck by the Balkan wars in the hearts of many Czech nationalists; one poem in it (Bojovnice) describes a woman who spurns the traditional sphere of home and family to fight beside men to liberate her country.

After this, however, Krásnohorská's verse did not diversify in any way. Nationalism remained her chief theme both in her own literature and in her approach to literary criticism. Her personal conception of

what the national struggle entailed led gradually to her isolation from most of the currents which were flowing through the Czech literary world at that time. She believed that Czech writers had a responsibility to their nation, that the national movement needed a literature which would both express its present aims and aspirations and create new ones. In the late 1870's she was one of the representatives of this point of view in a continuing debate between two journals, Lumír and Osvěta. She criticised the inadequacies of some contemporary literature, attributing these to a failure to acknowledge national roots, an excessive readiness to imitate foreign literature.

But her belief in the social responsibility of national writers, their educational role, never wavered, even when confronted with the new approaches to national or feminist literature which emerged at the turn of the century. Her original attitude of constructive criticism turned slowly to a positive belief that Czech was best and that to criticise the products of nationalist literature was to weaken the cause. This led her inevitably to some disastrous misjudgements; for instance, her vituperative attacks on Masaryk during the Manuscripts controversy, and her scathing dismissal of progressive students in the 1890's. She cut herself off from the development of nationalist ideas in the 1890's and the changes in feminist thinking which accompanied this - both phenomena to a certain extent the product of the influence of foreign ideas on Czech assumptions.

As a nationalist and a writer she was irretrievably stuck in the mould of the 1870's - and this was composed of ideas which were hardly new. The same could be said of her feminism. She imbued



Ženské listy with the same sense of social and national responsibility as she expected of writers, and she understood women's emancipation in the traditional terms of women's place in the national struggle:

"The Czech woman question must mean that the Czech nation should try to educate its women to become once more those brave, substantial collaborators in its great tasks and highest endeavours. Our nation needs many and fresh forces, and it is important that no good force remains unused; no capability uneducated. Every good will should - as far as possible - be admitted to the service of our sacred national cause, which is equally the cause of human rights, freedom, enlightenment and morality."<sup>78</sup>

Although she was a pioneer of women's education her endeavours here were as much nationalist as feminist inspired; she did not approve of the idea of education as an end in itself, especially for women. In feminism also, therefore, she lost touch with new ideas and lost the confidence of the younger generation.

New women writers were preoccupied by women's personal psychological development, their relationships with men, the imperfect present; whereas Krásnohorská thought more in terms of the perfect future which could be realised through the noble emotions of national struggle. It could not be long before writers like her were brought down to earth as the gap between their aspirations and indifferent reality grew continually wider.

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78. Eliška Krásnohorská, Ženská otázka česká, (Prague 1881), pp. 6-7.



## CHAPTER 2

### POLITICAL CHANGES: 1880-1898

Before the turn of the century the aspirations of Czech women were not political, in the sense that they did not impinge on the business of day-to-day politics as carried on by men. Women were interested in improving themselves and other women - education, and in helping the unfortunate - philanthropy. The inability of the poor to provide for themselves and the lack of educational opportunities for women were not seen as reflections of the social system but as things which could, with perseverance, be put right.

Women's interests and activities, in these terms, were merely incidental to the main stream of social life. There was no need for them to be represented in politics. The nationalist view of women's importance to the nation at least implied that it was possible for them to become involved in social life, but even so the influence they were seen to exert was a function of their sex and part of their natural field of activity.

The developments of the late 1880's and 1890's mark a profound change in attitudes to the woman question, not only among women themselves but among men, especially those involved in political parties. Women's concerns became political, and women themselves became politicised. The foundations could now be laid for active women's organisations composed of women from all classes. The 1880's were a decade of enormous political change and diversification. At the end of the 1880's the political scene was still dominated by one political party, the Old Czech party. Ten years later there

were seven parties, representing a spectrum of social, economic and political interests. Each of these new parties, moreover, showed an awareness of the woman question, a willingness to involve women more in politics and take notice of their demands.

One can distinguish several factors which were significant in the growing influence and politicisation of the women's movement. The decline of the Old Czech party and the rise of the Young Czechs provided part of the political background to these developments by marking the beginning of the process of diversification. The fact that Old Czech dominance had been broken meant that a space was opened up for new ideas and new social forces. The rise of the Social Democratic party was another important process because it represented these new social forces and the demands they were making upon society. However, aspects of Social Democratic doctrine, particularly internationalism, did not meet with complete acceptance from the Czechs, and during the 1890's there were several groups and individuals who wanted to formulate a progressive alternative to it.

T.G. Masaryk was one of those who criticised Social Democratic doctrine, though he was by no means out of sympathy with it. His importance to the 1890's lies mainly in his role as critic and independent political thinker, questioning the accepted tenets of Czech nationalism and trying to work out a political and social philosophy of his own. Masaryk was the principal ideologue of the Czech feminist movement and attempted to integrate his feminist sympathies with his criticisms of the contemporary political scene. Lastly, the so-called 'progressive movement' tried to synthesise all these influences, to select what it thought was appropriate to an



egalitarian, nationalist movement. It did not last long as a movement, and at the end of the decade was already breaking up into small parties, but these parties continued to make a political commitment to feminism, and played an important part in influencing the subsequent development of the women's movement.

### The rise of the Young Czech party

The displacement of the Old Czech party by the Young Czechs signified a profound change in the balance of power in the ordinary arenas of Czech politics - the Reichsrat and the Diet. The Old Czech party or, more correctly, the National Party, had been founded in 1861, and was at that time the only Czech political party. The new party, (Young Czechs, or the National Liberal Party), was in fact formed mainly of dissidents from the ranks of the old, and started life as a tendency within it, rather than a fully-fledged political party. Old Czech policy towards Vienna had been subjected to growing criticism in Prague. The party was accused of being too cautious, too restricted by its links with the government and the conservative nobility. The Young Czechs gained the ascendancy by promising to be radical and uncompromising; later, however, they were to find themselves in an equally difficult position, preaching radical nationalism and yet having to co-operate with a government whose aim was to balance the demands of one nationality with those of another, and thus avoid having to make major concessions to any.

Various factors conspired, during the 1880's, to loosen the Old Czechs' hold on power. On the one hand the political contradictions which were an inevitable consequence of Czech participation in the



government of Austria exposed them to a growing amount of criticism. The end of a prolonged and unsuccessful period of passive resistance had come in 1879 when the Old Czechs in alliance with the conservative nobles had agreed to return to the Reichsrat as part of a conservative - clerical government coalition. They hoped that they would be repaid for their support of the government by concessions to Czech nationalism; they justified the decision by arguing that conservatives were less potentially dangerous to Czech interests than the alternative, the German Left. In fact, their support of the government brought them some not insignificant rewards; the creation of a Czech university and some language concessions in the civil service. At the time these seemed inadequate, though in comparison with what was to be achieved in the next twenty-five years they were substantial. But whatever the rewards the Old Czechs were caught in a fundamental contradiction. The basis of their policy was the demand for Czech historic rights, and yet they were supporting a government which was centralist and which could hardly survive intact if it realised even a part of their programme. In addition, their support of the government brought them into alliance with parties whose demands were anathema to some of the fundamental tenets of Czech nationalism; the clericals, for instance. To vote for the government as they were supposed to do often meant voting for measures which were directly opposed to their convictions as nationalists and as democrats. In 1881 they supported (some very unwillingly) a law which reduced the length of compulsory school attendance from eight to six years, in order to ensure the support of the clericals over the division of Prague university. The political compromises they had to make were thus bound to expose them to criticism from nationalists who saw the

only way to independence in self-assertion against Vienna.

The Young Czechs had been an identifiable group within the party since 1863, had formed their own party in 1874, but had stood on a joint platform at elections since the return to the Reichsrat in 1879. In many ways they were not all that different from the Old Czechs - and there were many dissidents from Old Czech policy during the 1880's who did not necessarily identify themselves with the Young Czechs. Some writers have identified social differences between the groups;<sup>1</sup> Old Czech supporters seem to have been mainly of the established, prosperous and exclusive middle class, whereas Young Czech supporters were newer, 'small' men - small-town democrats, teachers, farmers who had not previously been involved in politics. They were opposed to the nobility and aristocratic privilege, and supported universal suffrage, which the Old Czechs did not. They were not prepared to accept the status quo, dualism and the dynasty; they were less 'Austrian' in outlook. Their rise to power was fairly swift, helped by the Old Czechs' inability or unwillingness to take them seriously as a political force. In 1888 they formed their own political club in the Reichsrat, and in the next year made significant gains in the elections to the Bohemian Diet. In 1890 attempts were made by the government to negotiate a German-Czech agreement. Only the Old Czechs, however, participated in the negotiations, which to Czech eyes seemed to concede far more to the Germans than to the Czechs. The reaction to the agreement on the part

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1. For example: H.G. Skilling, "The politics of the Czech Eighties", in: The Czech Renaissance of the Nineteenth Century, ed. P. Brock and H.G. Skilling, (Toronto, 1970).



of the Czechs was perhaps predictable; the Young Czechs repudiated it and so, after a short time, did the Realists. Their anger at the agreement was echoed by the new forces then coming to the fore; progressive students and young people. In the next set of elections - to the Reichsrat in 1891 - the Young Czechs swept the board.

In their opposition to the Old Czechs the Young Czechs drew support from groups who had not previously been much involved in politics, especially the progressive students who had emerged in 1889 around the 'Journal of Czech students'. These were attracted particularly by the Young Czechs' radical nationalism and their appeal to democracy, their reiteration of the State Rights programme and their support for universal suffrage. The Progressive Party (as these people had called themselves since 1890) actually joined the Young Czechs in 1891, when the elections to the Reichsrat were announced, and worked to ensure their victory. Their participation in the party was meant to be conditional on the Young Czechs' agreeing to be in opposition to the government and supporting the demands of the working class.<sup>2</sup> It was not long, however, before these radical supporters became alienated from the party. To some extent this was an inevitable consequence of the Young Czechs' actually being the largest Czech party. Now they also were faced with a situation where they had to make compromises with the government if they were to achieve anything, and this was bound gradually to disillusion those of their supporters who were expecting them to take up a radical,

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2. The full list of their demands is printed in: R. Wolf, České studentstvo v době prvního třicetiletí české university, (Prague, 1912), p. 66.



uncompromising stance. Although they went some way towards fulfilling their manifesto promises by introducing a motion for universal suffrage in 1893 they were not prepared for the extent of popular agitation which accompanied it, culminating in the discovery by the police in September 1893 of an alleged conspiracy against the state on the part of a group called Omladina. This provided the police with an excuse to arrest most of the progressive leaders and impose martial law in Prague. The Young Czechs did not protest very strongly either against the arrests or their sequel, and this did not endear them to their young followers. In fact, they were already beginning to find the existence of an independent body of progressives within their ranks tiresome and at the conference they held next year, at Nymburk, they facilitated the split with the radicals by adopting the principle of 'responsible opposition'.<sup>3</sup> These did not actually leave the party till 1896, when the final split was occasioned over the attitude to be taken to the electoral reform, but their importance in it and the extent to which the Young Czechs were prepared to listen to their views, decreased.<sup>4</sup>

#### The rise of the Social Democratic party

The Social Democratic party began to obtain a realistic foothold in the Bohemian Lands at the same time as the Young Czechs were beginning to grow. Its influence can be dated to 1889, the year

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3. B.M. Garver, The Young Czech Party, Ph.D. thesis, (Yale, 1971), p. 368.

4. Blanka Císařovská, Pokrokové hnutí a pokrok, Thesis, (Ústav pro české literatury, Prague, 1968).

of the Hainfeld congress and the founding congress of the Second International in Paris. Separate Czech and Austrian Social Democratic parties had been founded in 1878, but had never been in a position to create a stable political organisation, both because of internal weakness and lack of working class militancy and police repression. The parties in the 1880's had been riven by internal disagreement; on the one side were a large number of semi-anarchist maximalists who thought that demands for the participation of the working class in the legislative process were a waste of time and would only reduce their revolutionary potential; and on the other side were the gradualists, whose primary aim was to make alterations, however minor, in existing society to the advantage of the working class. Their victory, and the unification of the Czech and Austrian parties at Hainfeld therefore marks the beginning of a new phase of Social Democratic activity and influence, a new concept of organisation and the competence of a mass party. A good basis for the formation of the new party was provided by the significant upsurge of strike activity in the years 1888-1890.

It took time, however, for an organisation to be created. The main forces behind the calling of the Hainfeld conference had been the editors of Social Democratic newspapers, and these continued to play a part in providing a focus for party members, most of whom belonged to no party organisation, in the area which their paper served. There were a few scattered workers' societies, which rarely had any formal allegiance to the party, and usually combined trade union, political and educational functions in one. The history of Social Democratic organisation in the 1890's is first of all the history of the growth and development of these societies. Gradually



each of their functions was differentiated from the others: trade unions were formed and political societies, as distinct from educational clubs, were set up. The membership of these societies continued to increase until the end of the century, but already since 1892 the ideal form of party organisation, a hierarchical structure, with its base in local political clubs with elected representatives and committees on each level, was being worked towards.

The establishment of a political and trade union structure brought with it the usual problems associated with the enforcement of party discipline and the united party line adopted at Hainfeld. In the case of the Czech party these problems were exacerbated by the fact that centralisation of the organisation meant in fact centralisation from Vienna. One of the primary needs of any organisation was money, and one of the first measures to be introduced was a subscription requirement for members. A large proportion of Czech subscriptions for political and trade union organisation went to Vienna, leaving the Czech organisation little independent finance. Another point of difficulty was internationalism. The Czechs could accept the need for it in theory, but felt that in the practice of Austrian social democracy the concept of internationalism usually served to disguise German domination. Already by 1890 they had started to try to establish a certain degree of national autonomy for themselves.

Organisational uniformity and centralisation and the imposition of doctrine from above were the aspects of Social Democracy which its opponents in the Progressive movement quarrelled with, although they were completely in agreement with its programme of demands for



social legislation and incorporated most of them into their own programme. Some progressives also objected to the Social Democrats' policy on women; not the character of the programme itself but the spirit in which it was implemented and the lack of attention paid to the problems inherent in organising women.

All current Marxist theory on women implied that it was necessary to attract them into the Social Democratic organisation, but the reasons generally adduced for organising them at the time were opportunistic: if they were not convinced socialists they might act as a brake on the political activity of their men. This attitude may reflect the inadequacy of Marxist theory, but it also reflects the power of contemporary social attitudes, which this theory signally failed to take into account.

Czech Social Democracy, as part of the Second International, adopted the policies agreed on at its conferences, including those on women. The Czechs, in any case, were not great theorists; their contribution to the debates of the Second International was confined to the trade union question. As far as women were concerned it was really only the German socialists who made any theoretical contribution. In order to understand some of the subsequent developments of the Czech women's movement, both socialist and feminist it is necessary to discuss these contributions briefly.

Discussion of women was generally relegated to second place in Marxist theory. Marx himself rarely mentioned women or the family in his work, and one cannot seriously infer much from what he said, apart from that women's miserable position at the moment was largely a product of capitalism, and would disappear with it. The classic work of Marxist

theory on women is Engels' "The origins of the family, private property and the state",<sup>5</sup> but this concentrated less on the present position of women than on its historical evolution. The only socialist who tried to come to grips with the present was August Bebel, in his work, 'Woman and Socialism'.<sup>6</sup>

'Woman and Socialism' had a much greater practical influence than 'The origins of the family...' It was more accessible to the ordinary socialist and was very widely read. Engels may have been innovative theoretically, but his was a much more academic and difficult book. The first time many Czechs came across it was as explained and criticised by Masaryk.<sup>7</sup> Both Engels and Bebel attempt a historical perspective in order to demonstrate that women's position is a product of social and historical forces and is in no way 'natural', but in Bebel's case the historical analysis of the book is not very successful. He was, however, one of the first people to bring out a history of women in a popular form, and to try to make historical sense of the changes which women's position had undergone. The most important parts of the book are the sections 'Woman in the Present' and 'Woman in the Future'. 'Woman in the Present' describes the position of women in contemporary society with ample illustrations and statistics. One of Bebel's contentions was that society under capitalism was 'degenerating' - the divorce rate

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5. The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State was first published in 1884 and translated into Czech in 1906 by Bohumír Šmeral.

6. Woman and Socialism, sometimes known as Woman under Socialism, was first published in 1879 and translated into Czech in 1907 by Karel Vaněk.

7. In his book Otázka sociální (The Social Question), see below.



was rising, the marriage rate was falling, as was the birth rate, and sexual perversions were becoming more widespread. He saw these phenomena as a product of capitalism and argued that it stifled people's normal family and procreative instincts, defining 'degeneracy' in the same way as his nineteenth-century contemporaries. He described also the present-day lives of women; the work they did, the conditions in which they lived, the impossibility of combining family responsibilities with paid work. This must have struck a chord with his female readership. Again, Bebel attributed these terrible conditions and the problems which women faced to capitalism, and assumed that they would disappear when it was swept away. He did not, for example, think of examining the sexual division of labour as one of the sources of women's oppression, and his hazy picture of the future depicts women who are affirmed in their femininity, who feel free to marry and have as many children as they like.<sup>8</sup> Bebel seemed to react against contemporary caricatures of 'feminism' by asserting that there were immutable 'male' and 'female' qualities.

'Woman and Socialism' exerted a great deal of influence because it contained a picture and analysis of the present day upon which Social Democratic policy on women, such as it was, could be based. The conclusions drawn from it were expressed in the programme of protective legislation - which would protect women from having to do 'unwomanly' work - and also in the general attitudes of male Social Democrats to their female comrades.

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8. His description of women's life under socialism ends thus: "... woman is, accordingly, free and her children, where she has any, do not impair her freedom: they can only fill all the fuller the cup of her enjoyments and her pleasure in life. Nurses, teachers, female friends, the rising female generations - all these are ready at hand to help the mother when she need help." A. Bebel, Woman under Socialism, (New York, 1971), p. 347.



However, in terms of the Czech women's movement, and in the context of the liberal-humanist approach to feminism Engels' work is equally important. It was substantially criticised by Masaryk and formed the basis for some of his reflections upon feminism, which were then taken up by the Czech feminist movement.

"The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State" was an analysis of women's dependence and the special factors which made her subordinate. Engels' thesis was that the oppression of women had evolved in conjunction with the development of private property through family structures. He based this on evidence gathered from primitive societies, which demonstrated that these societies had been matriarchal; there had been no private property, and the monogamous family as we know it did not exist. He therefore sought to discover how women had lost their power and monogamy had arisen. He maintained that the present form of the family had developed from a state he called 'primitive communism' in which not only things but sexual partners were held in common, through various forms of family with increasingly sophisticated systems of marriage taboos to the present monogamous couple. In situations where the prevailing custom was polygamy or polyandry and paternity could not be ascertained it was natural that descent and inheritance should be in the female line. Engels argued that the transition from patriarchal family relations came with the almost simultaneous appearance of monogamy and private property.

The source of men's power over women, he thought, was their labour outside the home. With the development of a stable, settled lifestyle instead of a nomadic one, and technological change, opportunities and rewards for labour outside the home increased.

Women found it difficult to participate in this since they were too busy bearing and rearing children. Men thus had the chance to accumulate property, and could enhance their power over women. Once this property was acquired it had to be transmitted to the next generation; monogamous relationships were the only way to remove doubt about the paternity of children, and it was inevitable that they should become necessary to this process. Women were the instruments of this transmission though gaining nothing from it, and so it was necessary to keep them in a subordinate position and prevent them from exercising any choice in the matter of marriage. Engels made a distinction here, however, between bourgeois marriage and proletarian marriage. Marriage between proletarians, who had no property and therefore no need of the legal means of transmitting it, could be completely free. Once private property was abolished, the basis of men's power over women would disappear. Now that women were starting to work outside the home, in factories, this process was beginning, Engels thought. Their financial independence altered the balance of power within the family; inevitably, it would collapse in its present form.

In his vision of the future Engels put the emphasis firmly on fulfilment in personal relationships, rather as Bebel had done. With the constraints of property and the necessity of monogamous marriage removed true feelings would at last be liberated. Women would no longer be the property of their husband and families; they would be able to choose the way they wanted to live. He too did not question the sexual division of labour and its role in creating women's oppressed position, and thus he assumed that the destruction of property relationships would destroy everything that

was bad about human relationships and that this, consequently, was the only thing that needed to be striven for.

### T.G. Masaryk

The Social Democrats provided one analysis of women's position and a programme of how to change it; one which many of their young contemporaries disagreed with. Masaryk provided an alternative, with a moral rather than an economic emphasis, which had emerged partly from his long sympathy with feminism and partly from his criticisms of Engels' theories.

Masaryk as much as anyone had been part of the intellectual ferment of the 1880's and played an important part in helping to disturb and question the status quo and Old Czech dominance. He first came to the notice of nationalist society as the chief protagonist in the controversy over the authenticity of two manuscripts purporting to date from the early middle ages and discovered at the beginning of the century by the curator of the National Museum.<sup>9</sup> The manuscripts had subsequently become an important part of the justification of the Czech national movement, proving the ancient existence of a Czech nation and literary language and providing important data on national history. Masaryk and other young intellectuals, including the linguist Jan Gebauer and the historian Jaroslav Goll exposed the manuscripts as a fraud in a journal they had started - Athenaeum.<sup>10</sup> They thus brought down the

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9. The Královědvorský rukopis and the Zelenohorský rukopis.

10. Gebauer had already written an article declaring the manuscripts to be a forgery. The article he wrote in Athenaeum in February 1886 was a reply to a criticism of this. Masaryk supported it with an editorial.



wrath of the Czech nationalist establishment upon their heads; all who considered themselves representatives of the nationalist tradition rushed to attack Athenaeum, and Masaryk especially, as a traitor to his nation.

Exposing the manuscripts was only one aspect of the intellectual attitude with which they hoped to influence contemporary society. In founding Athenaeum in 1883 they intended to try to bring Czech intellectual circles more into touch with ideas then current in western Europe, to introduce a new spirit of criticism and intellectual debate. It was composed mostly of reviews and was especially valuable in introducing foreign books to its readers. In this way it could act as a counterweight to the nationalist tendency to think in terms of the glorious mythical past by encouraging the building of a nationalist movement based on contemporary demands. A serious movement for national rights should not have to rely on forged manuscripts to justify its existence and provide with with programmes for the future.

Masaryk, Gebauer and Goll were all professors at the new Czech university in Prague, which had been founded in 1882. They approached their university teaching in the same critical spirit as they approached the assumptions of the nationalist movement. They lectured on topics which were not usually deemed to fall within the scope of a university education. Masaryk, for instance, gave a popular series of lectures entitled 'Practical Philosophy' into which he introduced a strong sociological element. In the lectures he dealt, among other things, with the family and sexual relationships and the position of women.<sup>11</sup> He invited students round to his house, and his informality

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11. Zd. Nejedlý, T.G. Masaryk, (Prague 1930-37), III, pp. 216-240.

gained him a following among the more radical of them, as did the stand he took against anti-Semitism, for example, in the Hilsner affair.<sup>12</sup>

It was in these university lectures in the 1880's and 1890's that Masaryk's ideas on women were first set out. They were elaborated in his critique of Marxism, 'The Social Question',<sup>13</sup> and later in numerous brochures and pamphlets. An appreciation of the woman question was integral to Masaryk's whole philosophy, and he was exceptionally sensitive to the nature - not merely the fact - of women's oppression. He was one of the few contemporary critics to point out some of the gaps in the Marxist analysis of women's position, particularly the Marxists' underestimation of the power of contemporary social attitudes and notions of women's inferiority. His philosophy was essentially individualist, based on religion, especially what he considered to be the ideas of the Reformation, and looking forward to a world where ethics and morality would at last be afforded the leading place which he thought they deserved. While he was profoundly sympathetic to the practical programmes of socialism, the abolition of injustice and inequality, he could never agree with the doctrine of scientific socialism. It seemed to him that the theories of Marx and Engels amounted to economic reductionism, which ignored the most important aspects of people's lives, their psychological needs.

His thoughts on women's position, marriage and the family are typified by this concentration on morality and inner life. It was

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12. Leopold Hilsner, a Jew, was accused of the ritual murder of Aněžka Hrušová in 1899. There appears to have been no evidence against him, and the appeal against the death sentence passed on him was successful, but Masaryk and Cas were almost alone in exposing the anti-Semitism which fuelled the prosecution.
13. Otázka sociální. First published in 1898. The edition used here is that of 1946.



one of the axioms of his philosophy that no social change would be achieved without a corresponding change in the inner person; hence the change in attitude which he demanded of Czech nationalists.

Masaryk's analysis of the women question started from women's obviously inferior status in society, and then generalised from this to see what kind of changes would actually affect it. His conclusion was that any changes which levelled out inequalities and removed injustice, while desirable and necessary, would not fundamentally alter the position of women. For this to occur, people would have to start thinking differently; they would have to change themselves and their whole outlook on the world. His views are clearly opposed to any materialist analysis of society and to historical materialism in particular.

Marxism was the one philosophical system which offered a programme for women's emancipation. In 'The Social Question' Masaryk criticises the whole foundation of Marxism, and in one section he criticises Engels' ideas on the family in more detail, discussing the role of women in communist society. His objections to Marxism were many and profound. He could not agree with the idea that one could create a system to explain and foretell historical development, and especially that this system would seek to explain change by referring to economic factors. This for Masaryk was unacceptable for several reasons; primarily because of his views on the complexity of historical causation. He felt that events could be ascribed to a multiplicity of causes, that causes could operate with varying intensity at different times and that they need not uniformly produce the same result. It would be difficult, he asserted, ever to isolate cause and effect with certainty.



His idea of the multiplicity of factors immanent in any historical change can be seen in his rejection of other tenets of Marxism. Whereas Marx and Engels posited the dialectic as the motive force of history Masaryk enumerated a host of factors which he thought were greater or lesser components of this motive force from 'biological forces' - mortality and fertility - to 'social-historical' ones - human reciprocity and the division of labour, and finally 'historical' forces, in which he included fatalism and religion.<sup>14</sup> As he could not see economic forces as the crucial ones, so he could not understand why class divisions should be the most important in society. Many factors, he said characteristically, determine class, not only economic relations. But in any case he saw no reason why classes should be antagonistic towards each other, because there existed a powerful sense of reciprocity - humanity - between all people.

What comes through in 'The Social Question' and what is most important for our purposes is an emphasis on the depth and quality of human experience which a reduction to the economic base could simply not describe. Masaryk recognised the importance of the variables of sex and the sexual division of labour in historical development. Moreover, Marxism dismissed what he considered the most important aspect of change, its moral and ethical content. Religion, as he understood it - a mixture of Christian brotherly love and do-as-you-would-be-done-by - was the essential component of a just society, the most important force which drove men forward.

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14. Otázka sociální, (Prague, 1946), I, pp. 199-200.

The Marxist assertion that morality was relative was to him incomprehensible, and he felt that it was not even borne out by Marx in practice; the motive force of 'Capital' was the feeling of moral indignation against capitalism. This belief also led Masaryk to conclude that to posit revolution as a primary means of change was wrong. He maintained that, for some people at least, revolution represented the line of least resistance, relieving them of the responsibility of having to work for or plan the future society. The men who made the revolution would afterwards be the same as they had been before; what was needed to create a new society was not only a structural but a moral change.<sup>15</sup>

Masaryk's critique of Engels' 'Origins...' takes into a narrower field his general criticisms of Marxist theory. It centres on what he considers to be Engels' incorrect understanding and method, and is particularly interesting for us because it reveals his ideas and prejudices about sexual relations and the family. He used the very obvious shortcomings of the work to try to demonstrate that Engels was trying to alter the facts of history to fit his own ends. Firstly he argued that the facts, or Engels' interpretation of them, were wrong. He refused to accept Engels' arguments that the transition from one form of family structure to another had been caused by economic factors - in fact, he refused to accept that some of these forms of family had existed at all. Engels had failed to analyse many factors which certainly have had an effect on these changes; religion, for instance, household arrangements, or the upbringing of

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15. Erazim Kohak, Masaryk on Marx, (Louisburg, 1972), p. 351.



children.<sup>16</sup> Masaryk's thesis was that the family, if one ignored the way it had been distorted in religious teaching, was potentially the most important institution and force for good in society. It was not merely based on economic considerations, but fulfilled people's real psychic needs. These needs could not be ignored. Masaryk agreed that marriage and family relationships today were not, generally what they should be, but instead of contrasting bourgeois marriage, founded on the need to protect private property with proletarian marriage, outside the laws of property and therefore founded on love, he condemned the attitudes of male dominance which existed in the marriage relationships of all classes. Engels, he thought, had idealised proletarian marriage and morality while not taking bourgeois marriage seriously.<sup>17</sup>

Masaryk considered that Engels fell into the trap of thinking that sexuality and economics were the only important aspects of family relationships, and that he ignored the psychological and moral aspects of the family which were so much more important. In this way his society of the future would still fail to liberate women, because it would not free them from the tyranny of conventional attitudes towards women's sexual nature:

"With all his progressiveness Engels belongs to the old world: he wants to liberate woman, he wants to redeem the entire society, but he holds the very view through which woman, and of course man, is sexually enslaved. As if it were nothing, Engels announces that individual sexual love ceases earlier with men than with women, and that divorce is therefore necessary so that the man

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16. Otázka sociální, II, p. 47.

17. Ibid., p. 89.



can have a new love... The so-called woman question has never addressed itself only to women, but equally and to the same degree to men. The woman question is the man question - the man question is the woman question. From the very beginning of human development up to the present day there has always been a firm consensus between the two halves of society; in reality the man and the woman and their children - that is, the family, have always been a social unit... Engels destroys the consensus of both sexes and therefore depicts the enslavement of woman by man incorrectly. Patriarchy, as Engels depicts it is the enslavement of man, not only of woman. Equally, the question today is not only the liberation of woman but also of man. Woman should not be liberated from man, nor man from woman; both should be liberated, on the one hand from bestiality, on the other from decadent corruption. This will happen if we free ourselves of the pseudo-scientific prejudice that sexuality is the centre of life."<sup>18</sup>

Masaryk certainly did not mean by women's liberation the liberation of their hitherto-repressed sexuality. Rather, he thought that part of women's oppression was due to their having been restricted to activities which were thought proper to their sex and which were usually dictated by their sex; having children and bringing them up. Here his views were in sharp contrast to those of Engels and Bebel, who hoped that socialism would encourage women to have more children; he thought that Engels had a very Romantic view of the differences between the male and female temperament.<sup>19</sup> Women, Masaryk argued, needed to be relieved both from the tyranny of childbearing and from the belief that this was all they were capable of. While economic changes could of course help to achieve this only a moral transformation, a change in the appreciation

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18. Ibid., pp. 91-92.

19. Ibid., p. 91.

of the moral and psychological needs which Engels ignored could bring about the complete emancipation of women. The root of the problem was really social attitudes to sexuality, both women's and men's. In Masaryk's view, women were oppressed by the popular prejudices which held that abstinence was harmful to men and thus implicitly sanctioned the existence of prostitution. He thought that the importance of sex was over-emphasised; if men could realise this and bring themselves up to the moral level at which women lived they would cease to oppress them sexually. Moral equality would exist, and the problem would begin to be solved.<sup>19a</sup> He did not quarrel with the sexual division of labour as it existed, but hoped that in this way women would be able to overcome its hold on them. He recognised that there was some material basis for women's oppression, and so he was in favour of the establishment of joint households with as many labour-saving devices as possible, though fundamentally opposed to the socialisation of child-care.<sup>20</sup> On these foundations which would, he thought, free women as much as they needed or wanted to be freed the moral transformation which was really necessary could begin to be accomplished.

In some of his later writings Masaryk added to his previous analysis of the causes of women's oppression. If the primary cause was the false ideas about marriage, sexual relations and the family which were integral to contemporary society the main source of these ideas, he thought, was the teachings of the Church. Following St. Paul

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19a. T.G. Masaryk, Mnohoženství a jednoženství, (1899). Reprinted in Masaryk a ženy, (Prague, 1930), pp. 78-97.

20. Otázka sociální, II, p. 97.



the official teachings of the church relegated women to a lower position than men. They condoned marriage only as a way of restraining men's physical nature, while considering truly worthy only those men who resolved not to be entrapped in the sexual snares of women. In seeing marriage only as a necessary evil, and not, as Masaryk did, as the most exalted of human relationships they thus failed to acknowledge the family as the fundamental social unit and were thus to blame for the importance which society placed on sex. The double standard emerged precisely from this set of moral values, tolerating the existence of prostitution while idealising sexless femininity:

"Women and man are also equal morally, and with this... I attack the old cunning praise of woman's higher moral standards, her tenderer, weaker, feelings and her self-denial - these are phrases which enable a man to grind these ideas and feelings completely into the ground or, in his debauched exhaustion easily and cheaply to obtain someone to look after him."<sup>21</sup>

Masaryk clearly felt that the only remaining task was to show people that such behaviour was wrong. He appealed to the innate reasonableness in everyone. By degrading women it degraded men as well: it was therefore in everyone's interests to reject it.

The transformation of marriage and society which Masaryk envisaged would reduce the emphasis which society put on sex and re-emphasise the spiritual and moral nature of relationships between men and women. Only a partnership of people who were equal morally as well as economically could hope to create a really new society. He also stressed the importance of such a marriage and such a family in the national struggle:

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21. T.G. Masaryk, Moderní názor na ženu, printed in Masaryk a ženy, p. 62.



"This is the problem of our nation, of every nation, of the whole human race. For a small nation it is the most important problem. Only monogamy for men and women is the real guarantee of strength, life and progress. If it is true that the family and not the individual is the real social unit we must ensure that the family is cleansed and sanctified. A nation which lives polygamously has still not awoken; it is morally and spiritually asleep."<sup>22</sup>

Masaryk's ideas were taken up by large sections of the feminist movement and became increasingly popular in the years before the war. He himself had always been close to feminism; from the very beginning he had been a supporter of feminist efforts. It was probably, however, the influence of his wife which compelled him to involve himself further: as he frequently remarked, "In this question (the woman question) I am merely the representative of the ideas of my wife."<sup>23</sup> It would seem that, although he had always been sympathetic to feminism - even before he met her he had written an article on the subject - her interest encouraged him to formulate his views precisely and to look at the subject from the standpoint of religion and morality.

Charlotte Garrigue was an American. She and Masaryk met in Leipzig where they were both staying in the same pension. Masaryk tells us that he and the daughter of the house both wanted to improve their English; they and Charlotte therefore embarked on a programme of reading. Masaryk disapproved of their choice of reading materials and chose some other books: Mill's 'The Subjection of Women' and Buckle's 'The History of Civilisation in England'.<sup>24</sup> When they

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22. Mnohoženství a jednoženství, p. 95.

23. Milada Veselá, "Vzácná žena", in Masaryk a ženy, p. 188.

24. Nejedlý, 1/2, pp. 352-8.

married, as an acknowledgement of women's emancipation, they both took the surname Garrigue Masaryk. In the first years of their marriage, when she was occupied with bringing up a family in fairly stringent circumstances, Charlotte's influence seems to have been exercised in the domestic sphere, by example. One of the philosophy students whom Masaryk used to invite home, thus setting a precedent in Czech academic life, described the effect of an evening round the Masaryk dinner table with Charlotte joining in the conversation and being completely her husband's equal - obviously unusual at the time:

"Here one could see the magic of women's higher education, which manages to rise above the mundane and yet illuminate the circumstances of petty everyday life with its elevated point of view."<sup>25</sup>

She and Masaryk are occasionally recorded as going to political meetings together, and although at the beginning she was not very active in it, Charlotte was always interested in the women's movement. She was a member of the American Ladies' Club and attended lectures there until the disagreements aroused by the Manuscripts controversy more or less stopped the couple's visits. In 1890 she collaborated on the first Czech translation of J.S. Mill's 'The Subjection of Women'.<sup>26</sup> But it was not until 1905 that she really became active in political life. This was the year of the great suffrage agitation, when she finally joined the Social Democratic Party. She had undoubtedly been drawn towards it for a long time; one of her close friends was Karla Máchová, the Social Democratic leader, whom she had met at the American Club.<sup>27</sup> Charlotte was far from being a Marxist.

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25. Jan Herben, Deset let proti proudu, p. 36. (Quoted in Nejedlý, III, p. 153).  
 26. It was printed in the Educational Library (Vzdělávací bibliotéka), edited by the progressive student, K.S. Sokol.  
 27. Alice Masaryková, Dětství a mládí, (Pittsburgh, 1960), pp. 111-115.



Her religious beliefs were very strong, and it was precisely her kind of evangelical religion with its emphasis on doing good and love which led her towards Social Democracy as the only way of achieving social justice between women and men, as well as between rich and poor. She joined the local organisation in Malá strana, distributed Ženský list, fed the family from the local workers' co-operative, helped to set up the Social Democratic women's trade union and sold her jewellery to help the local poor.<sup>28</sup> She and Máchová were both active in the day-to-day organisation (the 'working section') of the Czech Women's Club in the early years. They organised the 'economic-social division', with a series of lectures, mainly on socialism; for, as Charlotte explained:

(a lecture on) "... the history of socialism should prepare an understanding of Social Democracy, which represents the effort to win the recognition of the equal value and equal rights of all people."<sup>29</sup>

She was particularly interested in girls' education, sent both her daughters to Minerva, and was a member of the Dívčí Akademie for many years. Just before the outbreak of war she and other feminists were hoping to establish a new political women's journal, but this came to nothing.<sup>30</sup> She was clearly much more left wing than her husband, although we cannot know how much she influenced his thinking. Most probably, she provided the initial stimulus for him to concern himself with the problems of women's emancipation in a

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28. Dr Vladimír Ryba, "S chudými jednoho srdce", in Paní Ch.G. Masaryková, (Brno, 1933), pp. 145-54.

29. Charlotte Masaryková to Zdenka Wiedermannová, 19th March, 1906. Reprinted in ibid., p. 158.

30. Oldra Sedlmayerová, "Život vítězný", in ibid., pp. 207-8.



serious way, but his thoughts developed along different lines from hers. She became more and more concerned with action and organisation, whereas for him these forms of activity were always rather second best. Her independent political activity at least testifies to the relationship which existed between them.

### The "progressive movement"

The so-called "progressive movement" was a phenomenon of the 1890's; it synthesised the varied political influences described above, in the sense that each of them found expression and acceptance within it, yet it was at the same time critical of each of them. It was by no means a unified movement, either organisationally or theoretically; it was composed of many different kinds of people, who grew further apart as time went on and their ideas developed. Yet it had certain common premises, in which the traces of the forces that originally shaped it can be most clearly seen. A concern with social injustice - a desire to end it - was common to all Progressives. Their approach was not philanthropic, as had formerly been the case with the student movement, but vaguely socialist; most of them inserted the Social Democratic demands made at Hainfeld into their programme. But their support for the socialists over the social question was partly negated by their opposition to them over nationalism. Some of them became radical national chauvinists and supporters of the state rights programme; others were more influenced by Masaryk's approach to the national question. All of them, however, thought that Czech national feeling was a force which should be taken into account and criticised Czech Social Democracy's subordination to

Vienna and lack of national autonomy. Another feature in common was their interest in the woman question, the family and sexual morality. Some adopted a Masarykian line; others were more influenced by anarchists and supported free love, but all groups thought in their own way that the resolution of the problem was crucial to the just foundation of a new society.

The formal beginnings of the progressive movement can be dated to 1889, the year of the closure of the Academic Reading Society and the foundation of the Journal of Czech Students (Časopis českého studentstva). At this point there was also an active Polish student movement in Krakow, and this, according to one of the leading progressive students, influenced the Czechs.<sup>31</sup> At first the movement was composed mainly of students and was directed towards a student audience. Its aim was to awaken them to political life; by implication, to make the future leaders of the nation more politically aware. It was assumed that students had an important political role as students; they did not have to join political parties. Much space in the Journal of Czech Students was devoted to describing ways in which they could make their political and educational influence felt. The preferred method was a watered-down version of 'going to the people', organising public lectures on various topics, to explain, for example, the worker question and the woman question, during the university holidays.<sup>32</sup> Although this attitude may seem

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31. Antonín Hajn, Výbor práci, (Prague, 1911), I, p. 117.

32. This was suggested as a suitable holiday activity two years running in the Journal of Czech Students (1889, 1890). Only in the second year was the woman question introduced as a suitable subject for discussion; most debates on it seem to have ended in victory for the anti-feminists. (Časopis českého studentstva, (1889), I, and Hajn, I, pp. 117-121)



patronising - and it is true that students tended to think of themselves as an elite - we must remember that in fact Czech students did not come from the social classes to which such patronising sentiments came easily. The majority seem to have been of lower middle class origin, and the faculty which contained the largest number of politically active students (the philosophical faculty) also had the largest number of poor students.<sup>33</sup> Politically minded students thus had a great deal in common with their contemporaries outside the university who were active in groups such as Omladina or in the Social Democratic party.

The progressive movement formed itself into a political entity in 1890 when they put up some candidates for election to the student club Slavia, calling themselves the Progressive party.<sup>34</sup> As described above, they joined the Young Czech party to assist at the 1891 elections, but their enthusiasm for Young Czech politics did not last long. One of the chief characteristics of Progressive politics at this time is their naivete and lack of discrimination. While they were still part of the Young Czech party they saw nothing wrong in adopting a programme which was composed mainly of Social Democratic demands; at their second conference they sent telegrams of congratulations to both the Young Czechs and the Social Democrats.<sup>35</sup> They began to formulate a theoretical programme at two 'Conferences

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33. Jan Havránek, Počátky a kořeny pokrokového hnutí studentského na počátku devadesátých let 19. století. AUC 1961, *Historia universitatis*, tom. 11. fasc. 1, pp. 6-10.

34. Blanka Císařovská, pokrokové hnutí...

35. Ant. Hajn, I, p. 293.



of Slavic Youth', in 1891 and 1892, held in Prague and Vienna respectively. The ideas which finally emerged are a curious amalgam of different political creeds, although there is a strong egalitarian basis, as demonstrated in the statement of principles:

"We consider progressive the student who opposes any domination of nation by nation, of sex by sex, of class by class..."<sup>36</sup>

Most of the demands which related to women were clearly borrowed from Social Democratic ideas, although some were more radical and others more conservative. The programme decided on at the first conference demanded universal suffrage for both sexes but omitted any demand for equal educational opportunities for women (included in the Czech suggestions) and requested the "limitation of women's work in general and especially heavy work", without asking for equal pay.<sup>37</sup>

By the second conference, in 1892, the mood had evidently changed. The Czech section was the only one with a complete set of proposals for altering the existing programme, and so most of these were accepted. They included a demand for the admission of women to all secondary and higher education and a change in the 'social-economic' section of the programme which in effect brought it into line with the Social Democratic programme on women. Now it demanded a minimum wage, equal for men and women, and "the admission of men and women to all work which is not dangerous to morality or harmful to the female organism."<sup>38</sup> Needless to say, no women were present at either

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36. Ibid., p. 179.

37. Ibid., pp. 180-90.

38. Ibid., pp. 296-301.

conference.<sup>39</sup> The only section of the progressive movement in which women were active at this point was Omladina, a group of young workers rather than students, whose paper 'Omladina' was adopted as a party paper at the Social Democrats' 1891 conference. However, their experience of being a part of the Social Democratic party seems to have deepened their sympathy for the Progressive movement. They sent a very enthusiastic telegram to the Progressives' 1892 conference, which got them into trouble with the Social Democrats, and at their 1893 conference they adopted the Progressive programme.<sup>40</sup> Omladina was unusual in that it seems to have encouraged women to be active; they spoke at conferences as representatives of regional groups.<sup>41</sup>

The programme of the second conference marked the theoretical high water mark of the unified progressive movement. After this the many currents within it gradually began to move apart; the forces which had held them together began to lose importance. The division of the movement into groups which later became parties was a slow and complicated process. One of the most important factors within it was the attitude which members thought should be adopted to the Young Czech party. As we have seen, after the initial enthusiasm of 1891 Young Czech policy became increasingly unattractive to the Progressives, who remained attached to the party only because there was no alternative, and perhaps because they imagined that they could be more effective within it than outside it. They could not, for example, establish a similar relationship with the Social Democratic

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39. A group of 'progressive girls from Prague' sent a telegram. Ibid., p. 296.

40. Ibid., pp. 293-5. Omladina, (1893) II, number 1.

41. Omladina, (1892) I, numbers 1 and 2.



party - although their demands were much closer to the socialists - because of their differences over nationalism. The predominance which the different groups gave to nationalism was probably the deciding factor in their final political allegiance. The one group which had constantly supported the Young Czechs and later formed the nucleus of the State Rights Radical party<sup>42</sup> were radical nationalists. They took as their starting point the need for an independent Czech state; their economic and social policy was therefore subordinated to this goal. They demanded economic self-sufficiency for the Bohemian lands in order to be able to withstand German expansion, and also a number of social measures; universal suffrage, the reform of sickness and accident insurance, legislation to limit hours of work and introduce safety regulations at workplaces, a shorter working day, a minimum wage, in order to abolish inequalities within the Czech nation and strengthen it for the fight. They rejected the class struggle in favour of the national struggle.<sup>43</sup>

The Radical Progressives, who emerged from the faction which had always opposed the Young Czechs,<sup>44</sup> had a policy which, at the start, was more favourable to the Social Democrats. They supported the Social Democrats at the 1897 elections. Their programme included many of the social demands which they and the State Radicals had inherited from the Progressive movement but they coupled

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42. The State Rights Radical party was formed in February 1899.

43. Císařovská, Pokrokové hnutí...

44. The Radical Progressive party was formed in April 1897; its members split from the rest of the progressives over the issue of whether or not to support the Social Democrats in the 1897 Reichsrat elections.



this with criticism of the Social Democrats for their theoretical rigidity and over-centralisation. They supported the achievement of Bohemian State Right as an eventual goal. Gradually, however, the emphasis on nationalism and opposition to or support of the Social Democrats led to a split within the party; in 1905 some of the Radical Progressives joined the Realists (Masaryk's party) while the rest moved towards the State Rights Radicals.<sup>45</sup>

Only one group within the Progressive movement rejected State Right and supported the Social Democrats. These were the Progressive Socialists, who emerged in 1893. They were electorally very weak, but are nevertheless interesting because they were the only group who did not differ from the Social Democrats over nationalism, but still had theoretical disagreements with them. They demanded, for example, freedom for disagreement within the party and argued that the Social Democratic model was German, and should be adapted to suit Czech needs.<sup>46</sup>

The relative predominance to be given to socialism and nationalism, and nationalist mistrust of the Social Democrats resulted also in the formation of a National Socialist party in 1898. This was, however, fundamentally different in character from what one might term the successor parties of the Progressive movement. It was organised along the same lines as the Social Democratic party, as a mass party, with the specific aim of taking votes away from it, rather than providing a coherent theoretical, albeit academic alternative.

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45. Jan Galandauer, Politické dědictví Omladiny a pokrokového hnutí po roce 1897. ČSCH, XII/6, 1964.

46. The Progressive Socialists included A.P. Veselý and F. Modráček. (Císařovská).

Its development, and its relationship to the Social Democrats will be dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

Another important influence on the programmes of these parties was the philosophy of Masaryk. His emphasis on small scale work and moral transformation was probably bound to strike a chord within parties which were too small ever to hope to become mass organisations, and in a political situation which held out little hope of the Czechs' ever being able to achieve substantial gains. Many of those who had participated in the Progressive movement had, moreover, been Masaryk's students at the philosophical faculty and his ideas had made an indelible impression on them. This was especially true of his ideas on women, the family and sexual relations.<sup>47</sup> Among the Progressives only those who became the State Rights Radicals did not follow his line. They took a view which was clearly influenced by anarchist theories and argued for freedom in sexual relations as long as it did not hurt anybody. They were in favour of prostitution, at least for the time being, and of contraception. The Radical Progressives and Progressive Socialists followed Masaryk and favoured sexual abstinence before marriage, the abolition of the double standard, and moral reform. Contemporaries nicknamed them the 'immoral' and 'moral' groups.<sup>48</sup>

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47. Jan Herben, a student who subsequently became a follower of Masaryk described the area of Masaryk's greatest influence for him then: "... that infamous question of prostitution, in fact, one's whole attitude to women, the family, sexual purity and so on... T.G.M. opened our eyes with those lectures. We looked into the eternal problem of the relationship of man to women, and serious consideration took the place of frivolity. Those who could not undo their past and their sexual misdemeanours at least stopped boasting about their experiences, and those who, thank God, as yet know nothing of such things ceased to be ashamed." (Jan Herben, *Kniha vzpomínek*, (Prague, 1935), pp. 222-3.)
48. Alois Hajn, "Masaryk a ženská otázka", in: *Ženská otázka 1900-1920*, (Prague, 1939), pp. 7-8.



Women's contacts with the Progressives were, however, limited. With the exception of Omladina, they seem to have been confined almost entirely to the Radical Progressives. For example, three women were co-opted on to the editorial board of the 'Journal of progressive students', but for some reason the experiment did not work.<sup>49</sup> Their influence is not detectable in the content. In general, it seems that progressive men did not have much chance to put their views on the woman question into practice, as we can see from this quotation from S.K. Neumann. One day a group of them were sitting in the room which served as the office of several progressive papers:

"There was a knock, and a young lady came in to buy something. The only editor there was Dyk (the poet's brother). The poor thing blushed, not knowing how to address her: Miss or madam. His progressive consciousness would not allow him to say 'dear lady'.<sup>50</sup> He solved it magnificently, by calling her 'madame'."

Given that the Progressives had very little contact with feminists, there being few feminists at the time, their interest in the woman question was all the more noteworthy. Whatever their views on sexual morality all of them were committed to equal rights for women - not merely political but economic rights; equal pay, protective legislation, a minimum wage. As a political women's movement developed at the turn of the century it was able to encompass these demands. Its previous goals of equal political rights, equal education, were proving inadequate to the emancipation of women. The programmes of the Progressives tried to synthesise the

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49. The women who co-operated on Časopis pokrokového studentstva were: Liduška Vlková, who later married Antonín Hajn, Věra Babáková, and ? Richtrová, both ex-Minerva students.

50. S.K. Neumann, Politická epizoda, in: Sebrané spisy, (Prague, 1949), X, p. 37.



demands which socialists made for women with the nationalism which had always been such an integral part of Czech feminism, and this was part of their appeal to women. In addition, the adoption by many Progressives of Masaryk's ideas on women and on the need for inner moral transformation demonstrates how influential these ideas were among certain sections of young, politically minded people. The women who were to become most active in the women's movement had often had the same kind of education as these young men and had perhaps also been Masaryk's students. Their experiences at university and as teachers or doctors, for instance, probably predisposed them to be sympathetic to Masaryk's ideas. One can speculate that their experience of 'equal rights' had taught them that there was still far to go before equality was realised, and that a profound change in social attitudes towards women would need to be accomplished.

The Progressive movement, therefore, helped to pave the way for the development of a political women's movement. It took feminism seriously as a possible political force, and thus encouraged other parties to do the same. It also created a programme for women which attempted to be both socialist and nationalist in character.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Adequate secondary education for girls was not available in the non-Hungarian lands of the Monarchy until the 1890's; women were not admitted to university until the turn of the century. Those women who wanted an education which corresponded to that which men received had to go elsewhere to find it. The Bohemian Lands, in fact, can only boast two of these women, Anna Bayerová (1852-1924) and Bohuslava Kecková, (1854-1911) both of whom wanted to study medicine.\* Bayerová was a miller's daughter and had to fight her parents all the way to achieve what she wanted. When she was fifteen they eventually relented as far as to let her study at the recently founded Výchovná dívčí škola (Girls' High School) in Prague, although they gave her little financial support while she did so. Here she remedied the defects of her basic education and studied for the exams of the boys' academic gymnasium, which she took as an external student in 1872-5.<sup>1</sup> Her parents thought that even the most extravagant educational ambitions must have been satisfied by this and summoned her home, but still determined to study medicine, she left for Switzerland in 1875 and enrolled at Zurich University. Despite considerable financial difficulties, which forced her to spend large parts of the first three years of her course at home because she could not afford to live in Switzerland she managed to qualify (at Berne) in 1881. Ironically, she was never allowed to

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\* For a biographical note on Kecková, see Appendix I.

1. A gymnasium is roughly equal to a grammar school. It provided an eight-year course for boys aged between 10 and 18, based on a classical curriculum. It was the only acceptable preparation for university.



practice in her native land, at first, because no women doctors were allowed and then because the Austrian government did not recognise her qualifications.<sup>2</sup>

At school and university the people who gave Bayerova the moral and financial support she badly needed were those involved in nationalist circles, particularly the Náprsteks<sup>3</sup> and Zofie Podlipská (Karolina Světlá's younger sister and also a writer, especially on education), who, according to Bayerová, was like a mother to her.<sup>4</sup> When she was in Switzerland Bayerová kept in touch with the Czech women's movement, writing letters about it to the American Club<sup>5</sup> and for publication in Ženské listy. She was aware of the significance for the women's movement of what she was doing but she had, nevertheless, a professional approach to her job. She refused to sacrifice her

2. After 1897 women doctors who had qualified abroad were allowed to apply for "nostrification" - which usually meant taking some more exams - so that they could practice in Austria. Bayerová refused to do this, saying that since the Austrian government had forced her to study abroad it was not her fault if she did not have an Austrian qualification. Permission for her to practice in Bohemia was finally granted in 1914, after a campaign by the Union of Czech Women's Societies, but she only made use of it for a short time. Women doctors were allowed to practice in the occupied territories of Bosnia and Hercegovina after 1892; the female population there was Moslem and refused to be treated by male physicians. Bayerova spent a year there from 1892-3 and hated it. (MUDr Anna Honzáková, Anna Bayerová, první česká lékařka, (Prague, 1937).
3. Bayerová was a frequent visitor to the American Ladies' Club and seems to have turned to Náprstek often for advice and information: (Památník národního písemnictví, literární archiv. Anna Bayerová. Bayerová - Náprstek; 20.11.1875).
4. MUDr Honzáková, Anna Bayerová.
5. L.A. PNP Anna Bayerová. J. Naprstková - A. Bayerová. 18.11.1875.



status as a fully qualified doctor and return to Bohemia without a guarantee that she would be able to practice there and earn the kind of money she thought she deserved.<sup>6,7</sup>

The difficulties which Bayerova experienced in getting her qualifications recognised, as well as the expense of studying abroad probably dissuaded other girls from following her example. For Anna Honzáková, the first woman doctor to qualify in Bohemia,\* foreign study was out of the question after her father's death and she was already resigned to not pursuing her studies beyond the secondary school level when the first girls' gymnasium was opened.<sup>8</sup> Bayerová and Kecková, therefore, remained isolated examples until the kind of education which would prepare one for a medical career became available at home.

The provision of girls' schools was hardly a priority with the Austrian government. Eight years of compulsory education was introduced

6. An attempt to get her to return in 1889 was answered: "No Czech woman doctor should settle in Bohemia otherwise than legally. I myself could not support what has happened in Germany - though of course it has happened through necessity - that women doctors, not recognised by the state, are supported by women's societies, and thus obtain a derisory living unworthy of their position and their cause." Zenske listy, 1889, p. 231.
7. Until 1909 Bayerová spent most of her time practising in Switzerland, with spells in Bosnia and England. She returned to Prague in 1909 and worked mostly as a teacher of hygiene in girls' schools. She had become a Christian Scientist in 1907, and was very active in the Czech Salvation Army (Armada spasy). She died in 1924.
- \* For a biographical note, see Appendix I.
8. MUDr Anna Honzáková, "K zápasu o lékařské studium," in: Československé studentky let 1890 - 1930. Almanach na oslavu čtyřicátého výročí založení ženského studia Eliškou Krašňohorskou, ed. Dr. Albina Honzáková, (Prague, 1930), p. 66.

for boys and girls in 1869.<sup>9</sup> The first five years of this were to be spent at the primary school and the next three at the supplement to the primary school, the "měšťanská škola", first introduced in 1869. Whereas boys had the choice of continuing to secondary school, whether academic or vocational, at the age of 10 or 11, girls had nothing but the "měšťanská škola", if their parents' finances would not stretch to a private school. In the "měšťanská škola" girls and boys were taught separately. The curriculum was intended to supplement that of the primary school and introduce new subjects, but those it introduced for girls were mainly domestic - child-care, cooking, sewing, - to prepare them for their role in life once they left school.<sup>10</sup>

For girls whose parents could afford it there were slightly better alternatives outside the state system; namely the girls' high schools, the first of which was founded in 1860.<sup>11</sup> These were intended to take pupils from primary schools at eleven and were initially planned as three year schools, a direct alternative to the "měšťanská škola". Later their scope was often extended to five years and some of them started their own preparatory primary schools. The basis of the education provided there seems to have been similar to that in the "měšťanská škola" - preparing girls to be good wives and mothers.<sup>12</sup>

9. Law number 62: 14 May 1869.

10. Česká politika, p. 304.

11. Others were founded in: Prague, 1863. Plzeň, 1884. Brno (Vesna), 1886. (This was founded by a women's society of the same name). České Budějovice, 1888. R. Neuhofer, Deset uvah o středném školství, (Prague, 1930).

12. V. Drchalová Langrová, Městská vyšší dívčí škola v Praze, (Prague, 1938).



The "měšťanská škola", therefore, marked the enforced limit of most girls' educational aspirations. For those who wanted to continue their education the only possibility was to become a teacher, and even here women found that their options were limited.

The opportunity of a teaching career in state schools was opened to women at the same time as the government made primary education compulsory.<sup>13</sup> They were permitted to teach mixed classes in primary schools and girls' classes in the "měšťanská škola", although the number of subjects they were trained to teach was limited, compared with men. The state took over a private training college for women teachers in 1870 and the number of women teachers increased rapidly,<sup>14</sup> but there were never enough places for all the girls who wanted to be teachers. Women teachers' societies constantly petitioned the government for another college to be opened, pointing out the danger to the young represented by badly trained teachers from convents, but their desire to increase the number of women teaching in state schools met a hostile response from men. Male teachers saw any increase in the numbers of women teachers as a threat and petitioned to restrict the terms of their employment in two ways - by allowing them only to teach girls (in strictly subordinate positions) and by forcing them to compete with men even for these posts. The "Society of Czech women teachers" retaliated, not by asserting the right of women to teach all children but by trying to carve out

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13. Law number 62, 14 May, 1869, also included provisions for the establishment and running of teacher training colleges for men and women.

14. In the Bohemian Lands in 1862 there were 45 women teachers and in 1876 1019. Zenské Listy, 1878, number 6.



an exclusive sphere for them in girls' schools - girls should be taught only by women.<sup>15</sup> Given the relative numbers of men and women teachers at the time,<sup>16</sup> this might have been a practical way of ensuring that women had some chances of promotion.

Until the turn of the century it was the career structure for teachers and their chances of promotion which largely absorbed the women teachers' organisation.<sup>17</sup> The fact that the education authorities in Bohemia (and in Moravia after 1905) operated a 'celibacy rule',<sup>18</sup> which obliged women teachers to leave the profession on marriage aroused little comment; perhaps these early pioneers took the innumerable restrictions placed on their activities for granted. By the early years of the twentieth century, however, a second generation of women was entering the profession. Some of these women had been to gymnasium and university and had much higher expectations than their predecessors. They and their contemporaries had been active in the student movement; they had followed the arguments about sex and the discussions of Masaryk's ideas on women and applied this to their own situation. Masaryk had argued that the change in morality which would be necessary to liberate women could

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15. These proposals were the substance of a declaration put before the Bohemian Diet by Czech male teachers in 1886. Zenské listy, 1886, p. 19.
  16. In 1897 the ratio of men to women teachers was 7:1. Zpráva k prvnímu sjezdu žen československých, (Prague, 1898), p. 75.
  17. The first women teachers' society was the "Spolek učitelek v Praze", founded 1874. This formed part of the "Spolek českých učitelek", which was set up in 1886 and began to produce a monthly journal, Časopis učitelek, in 1889. In 1895 it became part of the newly formed Jednota učitelek československých.
  18. Though the English term in such a case is 'marriage bar' the Czech phrase is always 'celibát (nucený celibát) učitelek': the celibacy (enforced celibacy) of women teachers.

only take place if men were brought up to women's level and lived by the same rules of sexual morality. Women would have to take the lead in bringing this about. Women teachers could therefore argue that for intelligent feminists to foresake marriage was a desertion of the cause; but so also would be to abandon one's career on marriage. Surely the two could be harmoniously reconciled: experience of marriage would deepen a woman teacher's understanding of her job, and vice versa. For these women a career was no longer the ultimate goal - personal fulfilment was also important.

Not all women teachers in fact opposed the celibacy rule, though all the teachers who were also prominent feminists did so; for example, Františka Plamínková and Zdenka Wiedermannová.\* Some of them felt that under present conditions it was impossible to combine motherhood with a career, and preferred to make this career structure secure before demanding any more concessions. Abolition of the celibacy rule, they thought, was an ideal, but there were more pressing problems which required attention.<sup>19</sup>

Women teachers were therefore fighting on two fronts: the professional front and the feminist one. As a profession, teaching produced a larger number of feminists than any other.<sup>20</sup> Teachers were

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\* For biographical notes, see Appendix I.

19. Arguments for and against the celibacy of teachers were staple fare for the readers of women's journals.

20. The two most obvious examples were Karla Máchová, the leader of the Social Democratic women's movement, Františka Plamínková the uncrowned queen of the Women's Suffrage Committee, and Zdenka Wiedermannová, the head of the Moravian women's movement. Marie Tůmová, the Committee candidate in the 1908 and 1909 elections was also a teacher. All these women were graduates of teacher training colleges rather than universities. In addition, a large number of the women who graduated from university went in to teaching; for example, Albina Honzáková, Božena Jiráňková, Marie Štěpánková, all early graduates of Minerva and later members of the Women's Suffrage Committee, among other things.



always conscious of their special position as professional women and the educators of the nation's children. The fight for women's education in the Bohemian Lands was closely linked to the development of feminist thinking in general. The change from an academic career and equal rights orientation to one which emphasised more the type of education which girls received and the need for many-sided development reflected a change in emphasis which is noticeable in the feminist writing of the period.

The most important step in the development of Czech girls' education was the establishment of a girls' gymnasium (Minerva) in 1890. This was the work of Eliška Krásnohorská, backed by the Women's Czech Industrial Society. The Society had for some years been conducting agitation on the subject of higher education for girls; the centre of their attention was usually Anna Bayerová and the struggle to get her qualifications recognised by the Austrian government. In February 1890 the Society, joined later by the Society of Czech women teachers, the American Ladies' Club and other Prague women's societies composed a petition for the establishment of a girls' gymnasium. They managed to collect 4810 signatures from all over Bohemia, and the petition was submitted to the Reichsrat.

The substance of the petition was that the changes in the situation of women, particularly their economic circumstances (the proportion of women to men; their reduced hopes of marriage, and their consequent need to earn their own living) made it obvious that women should have a right to professional education, especially that which suited their feminine qualities; "The deep voice of the heart summons (the woman) especially to two exalted vocations: the upbringing



of young people and the care of the sick."<sup>21</sup> (i.e. teaching and medicine). A girls' gymnasium was needed to enable women to follow these professions. This would, first of all, educate more women teachers - a girl who had successfully completed gymnasium was entitled to teach in the same schools as one who had completed teacher training college - and, secondly, would prepare girls for university. The petition concluded with the argument that the experience of women's university study in other countries gave ample proof of its benefits. Within the next few months similar petitions were submitted by Ruthenian women from Galicia and German Austrian women from Vienna.<sup>22</sup> As a result of this activity a society named "Minerva" was set up in May 1890 to prepare to found a girls' gymnasium. The driving force behind this was Eliška Krásnohorská. In a letter to Anna Bayerová she described how she set about preparing the ground:

"The first priority was to acquaint the general public with the question, air it in the newspapers and in Parliament so that people would become interested and the whole effort would not be still born. And they were interested, people argued about it fiercely (mostly against it), things got moving, good people preached at me or even spat at me in the street, and naive sages imagined that the question could be decided by polemics, petitions and impressive speeches. Dr Rieger took me for such a simpleton and informed me that I was not approaching it correctly, that I must take an administrative path..."<sup>23</sup>

Krásnohorská's plans received an unexpected boost in May 1890 when the Austrian government allowed a woman doctor, Rose Kerschbaum, to practice inside the Habsburg Monarchy:<sup>24</sup>

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21. Zenske listy, 1890, p. 66.

22. Ibid., p. 127.

23. MUDr Anna Honzáková, "Za Eliškou Krásnohorskou", in: Československé studentky, pp. 26-28. She is quoting a letter of Krásnohorská's to Anna Bayerová, 14. September, 1910.

24. Kerschbaum was the first woman doctor to be allowed exceptionally to practice in Bosnia. See note 2.

"As soon as the news appeared in the papers... I bought as many editions of the paper as I needed and went majestically, like the goddess Minerva herself, to the place of decision. The council was just in session. Through an official I sent the papers with the piece of news underlined in red, gave a message to the mayor that I was waiting for him and requested an audience for the reason that, in my delight at what the Emperor had done I had decided to set up a girls' gymnasium. The mayor came at once, and a few words from me on the significance of this act of the Emperor's electrified him so that he sent in to the session for his two deputy mayors. The session of the town council was disrupted for three quarters of an hour because of my business and the three heads of the town enthusiastically acknowledged that for such an 'important, progressive and honourable cause' ... something must be done, that the commune (obec) would certainly give me the room I demanded, and promised me all possible support..."<sup>25</sup>

And so in the next few months the school took shape. When enrolment opened in September 1890 Krásnohorská's action was vindicated - 56 pupils enrolled.

The aim of the school was not merely to provide girls with a gymnasium education but to act as a stepping stone to higher things. After the foundation of the school the Minerva society continued to exist: its role was both to keep the school running and to agitate for the admission of women to university and the extension of girls' secondary education. In 1892 the society sent a request to the Minister of the Interior that women be allowed to practise as doctors. Questionnaires were sent round simultaneously to doctors, asking their opinion, and the official body of doctors (Gremium) was also lobbied on the issue.<sup>26</sup> In December 1894 Minerva again took up the question

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25. MUDr. Anna Honzáková, "Za Eliškou Krásnohorskou".

26. K. Červenková, "Dějiny spolku Minervy", in: Československé studentky, p. 148.



of the admission of women to university, but the government stated that until the question of allowing women doctors to practise in the Habsburg Monarchy was settled the question of admitting women to university must wait. Undeterred by their temporary lack of success, however, Minerva organised a campaign in 1895 whereby women's societies all over Bohemia sent in 53 petitions with a total of over five thousand signatures asking for the admission of women to the philosophical faculty and medical school of Charles University.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile the first pupils were about to leave Minerva in summer 1895. Although they had managed to obtain permission to do the "maturita" (the final exams taken by all gymnasium students) they were specifically excluded from being allowed to use the "maturita" to get into university, as men could do.<sup>28</sup> There were several girls who wanted to go to university, three to study medicine and eight to study at the philosophical faculty. They applied for admission and were permitted to attend as "hospitantky". This meant that they could attend lectures and classes with permission from the lecturer, but that they were not allowed to take exams, and any work they did was not counted towards a degree because they were not matriculated. In 1896 both sets of "hospitantky" petitioned to be allowed to follow a normal course of study; they were refused, but when Gautsch became Minister of Education in that year, events at last began to progress. In March 1897 a decree was passed allowing women to become regular ("řádné") or external ("mimořádné") students at the philosophical faculty.<sup>29</sup> External study at the law faculty was allowed two years

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27. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

29. "Řádné" (regular) study meant that a student would be matriculated and able to take exams in the ordinary way. Mimořádné (external) study was that undertaken by those whose qualifications to matriculate were not recognised (e.g. those who didn't have a maturita), or part-time students.



later. Women doctors, although they had started first, had to wait till 1900 before they were permitted to become regular students and to obtain the doctorate of medicine.<sup>30</sup> It was clear that, once having allowed them to begin their studies, the Minister of Education felt that women could not really be denied the right to complete them. The employment of the 'thin end of the wedge' strategy, rather than that of insisting on waiting till they were legally equal to male students, had paid off. The preamble to the decree of 24 March 1897 stated that:

"It would be unjust to prevent girls from taking their final exams when they have prepared themselves properly by private study, and still more unjust to deprive them of all reward for their efforts, for they should be able to get recognition for the doctors' qualifications which they obtained abroad. For this reason the decree about the nostrification of medical qualifications was issued and now we issue a decree which opens to them the doors of the philosophical faculty."<sup>31</sup>

Anna Honzáková, the first woman doctor to qualify in Bohemia, described the battles which the medical students had to fight. When they first applied to be admitted as "hospitantky" the Czech faculty of medicine refused their request and they had to turn to the German faculty, where there was an enlightened professor of anatomy, Rabl, who was in favour of women studying medicine. Although the Czech faculty very soon decided to admit women (1897) the women stayed at the German faculty out of gratitude until the student riots of 1897 made it impossible for them to remain there, and they transferred to the Czech university. Every year they wrote once if not twice

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30. PhDr Albina Honzáková, Vzpomínky a úvahy k prvnímu jubileu gymnasia Minervy, (Prague, 1910).

31. Ženské studium na školách středních a vysokých. Almanach. (Sdružení akademicky vzdělaných žen), (Prague, 1917), p. 14.

to the Minister of Education asking to be allowed to become regular students. This was always refused and as they progressed they became more and more anxious that their years of study might not be recognised, even when regular study was allowed. When it was granted, however, in 1900, they were able to count the work they had done as "hospitantky" towards their degree: the first woman doctor to qualify did so in 1902.<sup>32</sup>

Admission to regular study at the philosophical faculty and the medical school represented the limits of women's achievement until the First World War. Other faculties did not admit them till 1918. But although the expansion of women's higher education was Minerva's most noticeable achievement, it did in fact stimulate a greater expansion of women's education at the secondary level. Some of these schools were gymnasia, privately run and openly following Minerva's example, but most were lycea, the government response to the demand for education for women.

Lycea were first given official approval by a decree of 11th December 1900. They were intended to be something between a girls' high school and a gymnasium, having six classes like a high school but providing a better education, more suited to girls who would have to earn their own living. The curriculum, unlike that of a gymnasium, was resolutely anti-classical. Girls who left lycea were prepared to enter certain public services or become teachers.<sup>33</sup> In fact, however, the main bias of the education provided was still domestic,

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32. MUDr Anna Honzáková, "K zápasu o lékařské studium", in Československé studentky, pp. 66-79.

33. E. Kholová, "Dívčí lycea", in: Ženské studium, p. 39.



as this quotation from the lyceum statutes laid down by the government in June 1901 makes clear:

(Girls who enter a lyceum are provided with...) "what it is possible to call girls' higher education, an education which reaches beyond the limits of the primary or měšťanská school, which incorporates the suitable preparation of women for her future career as a wife and mother."<sup>34</sup>

Thus both by virtue of the length of its course and the choice of subjects provided, the lyceum was inadequate as a preparation for university or as the basis for a professional career. This was the reason why most feminists were opposed to the programme of the lyceum as laid down in 1901. Since this was the type of girls' school which the government had chosen to support, the emphasis laid on different education for girls was, they thought, suspicious. The training for motherhood or low-grade women's jobs in girls-only schools must be seen in the context of the government's refusal to introduce co-education into state schools, gymnasia or realschule. A lyceum did not provide an equivalent for girls to the education provided for boys on any level, and ought therefore, they thought, to be reformed in that direction.<sup>35</sup>

Those who defended the lyceum argued that the boys' schools to which its critics wanted it to correspond were themselves in need of reform. The classical curriculum was outmoded; there was not enough attention paid to science or modern languages. The lyceum might pave the way to such a reform by showing how effective a school organised on a modern basis could be.<sup>36</sup> However, it would still be

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34. Ženská revue, (1905-6), I.

35. Časopis učitelek, 1906. Debate on "Ženské studium, (lyceum)": contribution of Marie Vítková.

36. Ibid., contribution of O. Wagner.



easier to prove the superiority of the lyceum if it were able to afford its pupils a realistic choice. Pressure on the government to reform the statutes so that lycea might extend their scope grew more and more insistent until the government issued a reform in June 1912.<sup>37</sup>

The reform laid down that the first four years of lyceum education would be the same for everyone. There would then be a choice between a two year "girls'" course, a two year commercial course or a four year gymnasium course leading to university study (or a combination of these). The possibility that this afforded of leaving the choice of specialisation till relatively late in the girl's career was considered a great improvement on the early specialisation enforced in boys' gymnasias.<sup>38</sup>

One can get an idea of how the lycea corresponded to what parents wanted for their daughters, or what the girls themselves wanted, by seeing how they reacted to the new statutes of 1912, particularly the requirement to set up gymnasium classes. Six out of ten opened these classes: many of them were glad of the opportunity to provide this more extended education, since there was no other way for girls to obtain it in that area. Lycea which did not set up gymnasium classes, or where there was a gymnasium near enough to be a rival, tended to decline in numbers after 1912.<sup>39</sup>

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37. E. Kholová, "Dívčí lycea", in: Ženské studium, p. 39.

38. The first girls' lyceum, (transformed from a six class high school) was set up in Brno in 1900. Other lycea followed in České Budějovice, 1903, Chrudim, 1906, Plzeň, Jičín, Hradec Králové, 1907, Vinohrady, 1908, Prague (Smíchov), 1909, Polská Ostrava, 1911.

39. Kholová, "Dívčí lycea", in: Ženské studium, pp. 47-51.

Most lycea were founded by a women's society and then got a grant from the state. This was not a fixed sum; it could be anything from two to twenty thousand crowns per year. Most also had additional financial support from their local authorities. Girls' gymnasia, on the other hand, were not approved as an institution by the government and thus could get no state support. They were fewer in number than the lycea. By 1914 three more had been opened: one in Prague run by an order of nuns, one in Valašské Meziříčí in Moravia, run by a women's society, and one in Pardubice. These last two were called "real" or "reformed" gymnasia and were somewhere between the classical gymnasium and the "realschule". They paid less attention to the classics, left out Greek altogether, and filled the gaps with modern languages, gym, and cultural history.<sup>40</sup>

The development of the original Minerva gymnasium in Prague always had a significance which outweighed its actual size and the importance of the issues involved. It started with only one class, a preparatory class in which the pupils were meant to cover the ground covered by the first four years of the boys' eight class gymnasium. Most of the teaching hours were devoted to Latin and Greek, which were the foundation of the classical curriculum then in use. After a year it was decided to extend the length of the preparatory course to two years, since the pace of the one year course was too strenuous.<sup>41</sup> Further classes were opened gradually, though it was 1902 before there were four running concurrently and Minerva could become a proper eight class gymnasium.<sup>42</sup>

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40. M. Slavíková, "Dívčí gymnasia", in: Ženské studium, pp. 23-4.

41. Minerva, výroční zpráva, 1892.

42. Minerva, výroční zpráva, 1902.



One of the most noticeable things about the first years of Minerva is the wide age range of the pupils, from fifteen to twenty-two,<sup>43</sup> which reflected the lack of educational opportunities hitherto. It was a long time before ages came into line with those in a boys' school. Most of the pupils came from Prague, though at the beginning there was a larger proportion from outside the capital. Later, when secondary schools began to open elsewhere it was no longer necessary for girls to come to Prague.

Financially the school was never very secure. It was given free accommodation, firewood and gas by the town council, which also made a small contribution till 1897. Many banks and firms, and some women's societies, gave large contributions to start off with, and some continued this yearly. The provincial administration contributed one thousand zl. per year from 1898 till 1910.<sup>44</sup> The society was continually asking for state support but this was always refused on the grounds that the time was not yet right for such action. Most of Minerva's support came from gifts, legacies and fund-raising activities. In 1896-7, for example, the society made a special effort to raise money, running bazaars, holding lectures, and other activities. They raised three and a half thousand crowns, which was as much as the rest of their income put together.<sup>45</sup>

Minerva had originally intended to provide education free - or at a reduced cost - for students whose parents could not afford it.

43. Ibid., 1892, 1893. (The usual age in boys' gymnasia was 10 - 18).

44. M. Slavíková, "Dívčí gymnasia", in: Ženské studium, p. 18.

45. Ibid.



But these financial difficulties meant that the number of pupils for whom the fees were wholly or partly waived went down to eighteen (out of a hundred) in 1900-1,<sup>46</sup> and the next year this system was abolished altogether. There was still financial help for poor pupils from a legacy left to the society but it only helped ten girls each year and then only from the second class upwards.

As an institution, Minerva always occupied a unique position as the showpiece of the Czech feminist movement. It was a testimony to the achievements of independent feminist activity in the past and it also contained within itself a promise for the future - more and more educated women to swell the feminist ranks. In many ways this was an uneasy position for a school to occupy, for Minerva wanted at the same time to fulfil its responsibility to its pupils and to achieve proper status as a gymnasium, with the correct number of classes and the right to set its own exams. But the conditions under which it was founded and the way it was run, by the Minerva society, made it seem the public property of the feminist movement. The character of the movement changed; so, too, did the educational context within which Minerva existed. Fifteen years after it had been founded, girls' secondary education was finally beginning to move forward. It is not surprising that within this changed framework Minerva continued to be a focus of feminist attention.

The 'changed character' of the feminist movement is a phenomenon which we will encounter subsequently in other contexts. The reasons for the change are too complex to be explained simply in terms of

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46. Ibid., pp. 19-20. In 1893 it had been 39/64 (Výroční zpráva, 1893).

different educational experience and expectations, but these elements played their part - as we can see by looking at the attempts which the 'new' feminists made to change Minerva.

The women who founded Minerva and composed the Minerva society for the first eighteen years of its existence had usually not obtained secondary or higher education because they had grown up before it became available. If they were active in the women's movement it was in the Central Czech Women's Society.<sup>47</sup> The 'new' women who supplanted them had at least completed gymnasium if not university: the equal educational rights which their predecessors set so much store by they thought inadequate. They were members of the Czech Women's Club and active feminists, usually involved in the suffrage movement.<sup>48</sup> Their strategy for social change was, naturally, rather different. The differences between the two groups over the future of Minerva therefore represented something more fundamental than simply different administrative policies.

Women students, teachers, and progressives in general had long been urging Minerva to play a positive role in the women's movement and direct its educational aspirations. In 1903 members of the women's circle of the student club 'Slavia' asked Minerva to join them in agitating for the state to set up a girls' gymnasium;<sup>49</sup>

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47. The first independent feminist society, founded in 1897, which became identified with the more conservative, patriotic brand of feminism. See Chapter 5.

48. The new committee included: B. Kuklová Bezděková, the president of the Czech Women's Club, P. JUDr. z Randě, whose wife was a great friend of Alice Masaryk, M. Štěpánková, an ex-pupil of Minerva who went on to teach there and was active on the women's suffrage committee, V. Laichtrová-Havličková, a member of the Progressive party, married to J. Laichter - a writer on prostitution and moral reform, Marie Tůmová, the women's suffrage committee candidate for the Diet.

49. See below, p.

this the society refused to do until Minerva itself was a complete recognised gymnasium. Then in 1905 another girls' gymnasium was set up, this time by an order of nuns in Prague. The women's movement and liberal anti-clerical circles urged Minerva to do something positive to oppose this, but it did nothing. Eliška Krásnohorská limited herself to a statement which did not oppose the new school because it was run by nuns but because she thought it would flood the market with educated girls, creating a female 'intellectual proletariat'.<sup>50</sup>

The real clash between the two opposing groups came in 1909, on the initiative of the 'new' women, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the way the Society and the school were run at the A.G.M. in October 1909. Half the old members of the committee were voted out and replaced with new ones. The new committee proceeded to initiate a programme of action with the aim of turning the school from a classical gymnasium into a 'realgymnasium', moving away from the classical curriculum to one with more emphasis on modern languages and sciences. A questionnaire sent to parents revealed that most were in favour, and official approval for the change was obtained in July 1910. The lower two classes were turned into 'real' classes, and 'real' classes parallel with the classical ones were established throughout the rest of the school.

The new committee explained its dissatisfaction with the old in a Memorandum published in 1910.<sup>51</sup> The complaints they made centred

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50. M. Slavíková, "Dívčí gymnasia", in: Ženské studium, p. 24.

51. Archiv hlavního města Prahy, Memorandum výboru Minervy, spolku pro ženské studium, 1910.



on one issue - Minerva's isolation from the outside world and particularly the women's movement. The statutes of the Minerva society laid down that it should support the fight for women's education - and yet it had refused to agitate for a state girls' gymnasium and had done nothing to prevent nuns establishing a rival school in Prague. Moreover, for a pioneer feminist institution the number of women teachers it employed was small.<sup>52</sup> Minerva's isolation from the main stream of the women's movement was, they felt, reflected in the decline in its membership. Its organisation had become undemocratic and power had been concentrated in the hands of a few paid staff of the society. The plan they put forward would, they hoped, change this, involve parents and members of the public in the development and activities of the school and reassert the responsibility of the society to agitate for better career opportunities for women graduates and teachers.

This, however, was only the beginning of a polemic between the new committee and the old that occupied the feminist press for several months. The old committee accused their successors of undemocratic 'terrorist' tactics, of not respecting the devoted work which had been put into the society for so many years.<sup>53</sup> Really, the issue was not what either side had done or was intending to do for Minerva but what each represented. For the old committee the new one was composed of members of the Czech Women's Club, who simply wanted to turn Minerva into a 'branch' of the club. They were a

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52. 7/17 in 1910. (Memorandum).

53. "Ještě k valné hromadě Minervy". Ženská revue (1910), V, number 12.

group of mindless 'progressives', trying systematically to impose their own programme on a movement which they had in no way helped to create. Pavla Maternová, describing the events so far in Ženský svět, attacked the women from the Club:

"This group has a method which it uses in every situation: to get involved in new organisations, to want to advise them so that they can act according to its views - sometimes completely false and based on an utter ignorance of the affair in hand - but not to make any effort and not to do anything in order to incorporate these views into something tangible.

Despite the above strategy this group or circle of persons has gained such popularity that today its members glitter at the helm of the most prominent and vigorous national institutions. In time they will be the only names that people know and important women, representatives of culture and life in our nation will lose their voice."<sup>54</sup>

In the same way as they had been accused of irresponsible innovations, the new committee accused the old of resting on their laurels, neglecting their duty by failing to keep up with the times. Their criticism was directed especially at Eliška Krásnohorská after she had weighed in to the debate with her "Testimony about Minerva", which hurled accusations of 'ungratefulness' in all directions.<sup>55</sup> Her reputation as the figurehead of Minerva, one of the chief representatives of the women's movement was not justified in practice. Františka Plamínková, one of the newly elected committee members, wrote that they had become convinced:

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54. "Zápas o 'Minerva'", Ženský svět, 1910, c. 20.

55. E. Krásnohorská, Svědectví o Minervě, (Prague, 1912).

"that Minerva was the domain of one person, an autocrat, who had the outlook and the strength to concentrate trustworthy people around herself and to achieve something great with them - but who did not have the strength to move with the times, to sense their imperative, who had less love for her work, for its further peaceful development, than she had for herself."<sup>56</sup>

From a civilised beginning the debate about Minerva had rapidly developed into a slanging match between the old committee and the new. The original issues were submerged in invective about ungratefulness, mindless militancy, clerical reaction - and contemporary observers on the progressive side drew the appropriate lesson for the women's movement. One of the additional accusations employed by both sides was that of political bias: the old committee was accused of being unduly favourable to the Young Czechs, and had certainly used Národní listy on several occasions to spread their point of view. The new committee contained four members of the Progressive party<sup>57</sup> and others were suspected of being tarred with the same brush. The hysteria aroused by the whole issue made these women wonder whether the Czech women's movement would ever manage to act in unison. Olga Stranská, the head of the women's section of the Progressive party\* wrote:

"Now imagine how a party can be won over (to support women's rights) by women who are enraged against progressive women - who are fighting for the vote - to the extent demonstrated at the Minerva A.G.M. How is united action possible here?"<sup>58</sup>

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56. Ženský obzor, (1910-11), X, number 2.

57. Ženská revue, (1910), V, number 10.

\* For a biographical note, see Appendix I.

58. Ženský obzor, (1910-11), X, number 1.



Such complete lack of agreement, which went so far that quarrels like this were actually aired in public prevented, Stranská thought, the development of a united women's movement and made it all the more imperative for the progressives to assume direction.<sup>59</sup>

If women's educational institutions, and particularly Minerva, were seen as the public property of the feminist movement it is perhaps inevitable that its students, or at least their political activity, should become public property as well. The existence of the ex-students of Minerva was a guarantee of feminist progress; the wider their influence could be spread the better. In a discussion about the role of women students in 1913, a male student wrote:

"If we have faith in the progress of the women's movement we must at the same time be aware that this progress cannot come from the lower, less educated classes, from unfortunate working women weighed down by material, everyday worries, or from the women of the half-educated bourgeoisie, ruled by convention, but only from the female intelligentsia. The female intelligentsia has the future in its hands!"<sup>60</sup>

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59. Once the echoes of this dispute had died down, however, Minerva's problems did not come to an end. With the change from classical to 'realgymnasium' the provincial authorities withdrew their financial support. At the same time, the steady increase in pupils and the pre-existing need for more space and equipment caused a steady drain on the school's financial resources. Continual requests for support from the Ministry of Education having failed, they were thrown back on the support of the town council. The council was anxious to be represented on the governing body; negotiations about this went on for two years until an agreement was finally reached in 1913. This introduced a new type of governing body, a "curatorium", with two-thirds of its members appointed by the council and one-third by Minerva. Minerva could thus be outvoted at any time, and it soon became clear that the council was not particularly interested in the feminist educational principles which Minerva thought it should represent and foster. See: Ženský obzor, roc. 12, c. 6, 7. Roc. 13, c. 8.

60. Studentská revue, (1912-13), p. 51.

Unfortunately, however, women students generally failed to live up to the expectations cherished by both male students and feminists. They were not unusually active in student life and were often concerned more with academic success than with student politics. The first women at university do not seem to have found it easy to integrate into student life, and other students found them standoffish and unfriendly. In 1900 a male student wrote:

"Of course there is no real fellowship between the two sides; men and women students have only study in common, otherwise they are strange to each other both in upbringing and way of life."<sup>61</sup>

Most assessments of the role of women students in the pre-war period echo this view. They continually disappoint the hopes placed in them by feminists and liberals and are no more politically aware than their colleagues.

But despite their failure to achieve a feminist revolution in student life women students did make their mark on political developments and gradually became an identifiable group committed to defending their own interests. In the early 1890's some girls at Minerva had contacts with the progressive student movement and wrote articles on women's education for Nové proudy and Časopis pokrokového studentstva, although they felt very much on the fringes of student life, too paralysed by shyness to be able to speak at meetings.<sup>62</sup> They and other women students later helped to set up 'Ženský obzor' (1896). Vera Babáková described their motives:

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61. Almanach 'Slavie', (1899-1900).

62. Vera Babáková, "První středisko českých studentek", in: Ženské studium, pp. 80 - 81.

"a longing for truth, for a serious, deep life founded on moral principles. At that time we were full of faith in the glorious future of Czech feminism".<sup>63</sup>

After 'Ženský obzor' closed down through lack of money at the end of 1896 the women in it did not make any further effort to organise women students until 1899. Then they decided that women students needed an organisation which would represent their interests, form them into a united front. After weighing up the respective benefits of joint organisation with men and separate organisation they decided on a compromise, a women's circle within the men's student club Slavia.<sup>64</sup>

The 'Slavia' women's circle (Ženský krouzek Slavie) declared itself to be an educational, not a political society. Its aim, as declared in its programme, was to give its members a deeper understanding of the woman question through various types of education:

"Although the Slavia women's circle recognises that the woman question is inseparable from the 'man question' and therefore only a part of the human question, it sees nevertheless that in the century which has just passed and in our century the situation of women has been changing to an unusual degree, and in this dislocation old views and new ones exist alongside one another; indeed, completely new ideas are being created. It can see that as a result of this not only society but many individuals have no coherent opinion on the woman question; and therefore the Slavia women's circle acknowledges that through getting to know individual sides of the woman question (anthropology, history, etc.) the members of our society should find a justification for the modern healthy view that a woman is a person."<sup>65</sup>

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63. Ibid., p. 81.

64. Vera Babáková, one of the founder members, was already the only woman on the committee of Slavia.

65. Announcement in Naše doba, IX, (1901-2), p. 158.



Sometimes the students invited a visiting speaker to talk to them on some aspect of the woman question; in the first two months of 1901 they had an impressive programme, including Tereza Nováková, "The aim and extent of the women's movement", and T.G. Masaryk, "Woman and politics". At other times they would hold discussions among themselves on books relating to women; for example, Lily Braun or Laura Marholm,<sup>66</sup> and there were also meetings on feminist issues such as prostitution or the celibacy of women teachers. In the tradition of viewing students as potential leaders, the members of the women's Slavia circle also wanted to use their knowledge outside academic life, to work with women workers and shop assistants,<sup>67</sup> but this plan does not seem to have been put into practice. In addition the circle initiated some feminist campaigns; for example, the campaign to get Minerva taken over by the state, and an action of protest against the alleged anti-Semitism of the Czech women's club.<sup>68</sup>

Membership of the group was not in fact restricted to students: certain women from the Czech women's club often came after its foundation in 1904<sup>69</sup> and male students seem to have come to some of the meetings.<sup>70</sup> But this did not end worries about recruiting new members, and complaints about the lack of interest in such activity on the part of modern students. When Slavia closed

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- 66. Anna Fischerova, "Z počátku organisace akademicky vzdělaných žen", in: *Ženské studium*, p. 89.
  - 67. PNP Alice Masarykova. Minute book of Ženský kroužek 'Slavie', 1903.
  - 68. *Ibid.*
  - 69. For example, Anna Maria Tilschová, and Helena Malířová, the novelists, Karla Máchová, the Social Democratic leader.
  - 70. PNP Alice Masaryková, Slavie minute book.

down the circle became part of its successor, the Union of Czech Students, but it seems to have been incapacitated by quarrels about membership and eligibility. It finally stopped functioning in 1906.<sup>71</sup>

This was a low time for the student movement generally; political energy was concentrated in the universal suffrage campaign. It was 1908 before another organisation for women students emerged, and this time it was more like a trade union organisation to represent the interests of academically educated women; that is, for older women who had already finished their education, as well as students.<sup>72</sup>

The 'Association of Academically Educated Women' was a response to the difficulties and discrimination which women still faced when they had qualified, but its founders desired also to unite all generations of women students into an identifiable body within the women's movement.<sup>73</sup> The predominance of older women in the association, however, led to the predominance of the 'trade union' aspect of its activity, something which was regretted by male students because, they thought, it isolated women from the political currents of the student movement and prevented them from discussing current issues.<sup>74</sup> It was not till 1913 that it began to diversify, founding, for instance, a 'sociological section' under Alice Masaryk.

As time went on the usefulness of such an organisation in the professional field became apparent. Men's organisations could not

71. Ibid.

72. This was precisely the problem with official student societies which would not admit graduates and non students. As we have seen, the Slavia women's circle had always admitted any woman who wanted to come.

73. Anna Fischerová, "Z počátku organisace akademicky vzdělaných žen", in: Ženské studium, pp. 93-4.

74. Studentská revue, (1912-3), p. 50.

devote so much time to defending women's interests; nor, indeed, wanted to. The Association's activity basically consisted of campaigns about academic education and jobs. It assumed the former role of Minerva in agitating for the admission of women to other branches of university study, particularly law and technical subjects, until the outbreak of war forced it to postpone the campaign indefinitely.<sup>75</sup> Another primary concern was to change the type of education provided by lycea. This had been one of the preoccupations of feminist educationalists ever since lycea were first opened but the Association's plans were overtaken by the government reform of 1912. They then turned their attention to lyceum teachers who were no so well qualified as gymnasium teachers, and who found that the jobs for which they were eligible were severely limited.

The question of jobs for educated women composed the other half of their concerns. They organised lectures to fill in the gaps of the education of school leavers and set up an employment advice bureau. Their particular interest was always teachers and their right to responsible positions.<sup>76</sup>

As the number of women students increased the problem of making some financial provision for the poorer ones became pressing. While male students had a number of societies and funds which provided money or cheap accommodation to help students survive university women had nothing. In 1912 the Association set up a fund which

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75. They were finally admitted after the war.

76. Academic life and posts at universities were still closed to women graduates, so a large proportion of them turned to teaching.



would pay a few students a certain amount each year, and in 1913 a holiday fund. Most of the money came from members' subscriptions and donations. They also set up and subsidised a women's university hostel (kolej), though this did not come into being till 1917.<sup>77</sup>

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77. M. Slavíková, A. Císařová, Deset let sdružení akademicky vzdělaných žen, in: Ženské studium, pp. 96-120.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ORGANISATION OF WOMEN WITHIN THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTIES

By the end of the nineteenth century the changes brought about by industrialisation in Bohemia had begun to have some effect on the position of working-class women. Looking at the labour force in general one can detect a predictable shift from agriculture to industry. This change was reflected - very gradually - in patterns of employment among women. It would be a mistake to imagine, however, that women were rapidly becoming fully-fledged members of the industrial proletariat; up to 1914 they were still concentrated in agriculture, and where they worked in industry it was in traditional spheres like textiles. The kind of work they did also bore more relation to home-based and family oriented production.

Although the number of women actually employed in agriculture and industry was roughly equal in 1900 and 1910, women formed a far greater proportion of the total labour force in agriculture - about one half, as opposed to less than one third in industry. However, most of the women who worked in agriculture were classified, not as workers or day labourers but as "family assistants" (Mithelfende Familienmitglieder). Although their labour was probably essential to the family plot or smallholding, they were not paid and therefore not recognised as employees. In fact, the number of family assistants was almost as large as that of agricultural workers and day labourers put together, and most of them were women. Women continued to predominate in agricultural work and to outnumber their sisters in industry until the First World War, but statistics show that their

numbers were gradually decreasing. From 1900-1910 the number of women agricultural workers and family assistants dropped sharply. This shift was complemented by a rise in the number of women industrial workers, not paralleled by an equivalent increase in the number of male industrial workers. We can see that the category of family assistant also existed in industry, reflecting the extent to which old forms of home-based production still prevailed - and made use of female labour.

The agricultural and industrial labour force in Bohemia in 1900 and 1910

<u>Agriculture</u>		<u>1900</u>	<u>1910</u>
workers	men	200,928	193,308
	women	171,199	106,151
day labourers	men	64,877	45,925
	women	61,997	60,228
family assistants	men	88,306	99,732
	women	401,496	338,320
<u>Industry</u>		<u>1900</u>	<u>1910</u>
workers	men	686,507	675,073
	women	211,553	268,055
day labourers	men	24,359	30,794
	women	5,582	5,921
family assistants	men	7,119	4,673
	women	26,054	20,484

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1. Compiled from tables in Statistisches Handbuch des Königreichs Böhmen, Prague, 1913, table 9; and Manuel Statistique de la république Tchécoslovaque, Prague, 1920, 11, 2.



There was a great number of women also in domestic service. Their numbers are hard to assess, but even if one simply counts the numbers under "Hausdienerschaft" in the statistical tables for 1900, this comes to about 100,000.<sup>2</sup>

Women who worked in industry were employed in certain well-defined areas. Most of them worked in textiles; then came garment-making and the food industry.<sup>3</sup> Within these categories women tended to work in small concerns. More than a third of textile workers worked in concerns which employed less than 20 people, and in the garment trade only one in ten workers was in a concern employing more than 20.<sup>4</sup> Women were usually confined to the unskilled, badly-paid ends of the trades they joined, and so there was little possibility of their being able to better their position through joining a union. Union membership was lowest in those trades where women were employed.<sup>5</sup>

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2. Statistisches Handbuch, table 9.

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	<u>Workers</u>		<u>Day labourers</u>		<u>Apprentices</u>	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Textiles	108,449	136,383	1,956	823	1,733	454
Garment trade	59,307	51,024	177	176	19,311	14,875
"Stone and earth" industries	71,547	23,696	6,524	1,379	3,344	128
Food	56,540	17,994	2,597	487	11,913	149

From: Vlastimila Křepeláková, Struktura a sociální postavení dělnické třídy v Čechách 1906-1914, AUC, Philosophica et historica monographia: LI, 1973, (Prague, 1973), p. 16. Křepeláková does not make use of a separate category of family assistants.

4. Křepeláková, pp. 17-18.

5. In 1906 only 8.76% of the female workforce in textiles was organised in trade unions, as compared with 15.62% of the men. 0.78% of the women in the garment trade were organised, as compared with 9.07% of the men: L. Steiner and E. Skatula, Deset roků odborového hnutí československého, (Prague, 1907), pp. 163-4.

The work which women did reflected their family status, and the difficulties which they experienced in combining family responsibilities with paid work. In agriculture, for example, where women could take their children with them to the fields if necessary there were almost as many married women workers as single ones. In industry and trade, however, less than a third of the female workforce was married.<sup>6</sup> But women's family status itself was also changing; between 1890 and 1914 there was a sharp decline in the number of children born to married women:

Live births per 1,000 married women

1880-1 242.2

1900-1 231.7

1910-11 192.6

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The change in women's pattern of employment must have been one of the reasons behind this, although obviously not the only one. In any case, it was clearly a significant development in terms of women's long-term position. In theory, therefore, there was some scope for working-class parties to recruit women, although they were inevitably hampered by the structure of women's employment and their low level of unionisation. Another obstacle in the way of recruitment must have been domestic commitments, which either forced

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6. Křepeláková, p. 28. One interesting exception to this were the women construction workers. Construction work was the only field in which there were more married women than single. There was also a very high degree of unionisation - 40.41% of the women were in a union, compared with 33.43% of the men. Steiner and Skatula, pp. 163-4.
7. Ludmila Karníková, Vývoj obyvatelstva v českých zemích 1754-1914, (Prague, 1965), p. 198.

working-class women to give up work altogether or left them with little time for politics. In addition there was the size of the agricultural labour force and the uncountable numbers of women in domestic service. The difficulties which the women organisers of the Social Democratic and the National Socialist parties faced must therefore be borne in mind.

By 1914 the Social Democrats and National Socialists had about ten thousand women members between them. Although they operated along different lines from the middle class feminists the two sides still shared several interests in common. They were involved, for example, in feminist clubs (the Czech Women's Club) and campaigns (the suffrage campaign). On the whole, the leading women in all three groups were friendly with each other; often they were of similar social origin.

Social Democratic and National Socialist women were distinguished from the feminists primarily by their method of organisation. Both of them formed part of a mass organisation with a strict hierarchy, which founded its own newspapers, clubs and trade unions. The feminist movement, by comparison, was loose and informal, would wait for these institutions to be created and only then attempt to draw them into some larger structure.

Organisation, however, was the two parties' main common denominator. They had substantial ideological differences. The Social Democrats' form of organisation was the expression of a theory about the part to be played by the working class in the downfall of capitalist society. According to this, women's position was a product of capitalism and would be swept away with it; it was therefore



necessary to organise women workers on the same basis as men. The National Socialists adopted a similar form of organisation, but in their case it was merely pragmatic and not justified by any kind of theory; intended only to oppose the Social Democrats. The party emerged as a nationalist response to Social Democratic internationalism in 1897-8. Its foundation was engineered and financed by the Young Czech party, which was keen to channel working class support into an organisation which could be counted on not to oppose their nationalist policies. Some of the leaders of the new party for instance, Václav Klobáček, were former Progressives, from the section which had supported radical nationalism and remained loyal to the Young Czechs.

The National Socialists aimed their propaganda specifically at the lower middle and working classes. They exploited and encouraged nationalist, anti-German and anti-Semitic feelings in order to gain support at the expense of the Social Democrats. Their need to appeal to a similar constituency to the Social Democrats in the name of socialism forced the National Socialists to adopt a similar type of organisation, a hierarchy with small local groups at the bottom, rising through district and provincial organisations to an elected executive committee at the top. They developed their own trade unions, groups for special interests (women, for example,) and of course a party press, with two daily papers, weeklies and monthly magazines.

There are several points at which one can compare women in the National Socialists with women in the Social Democrats, though the comparison cannot be carried too far. Both parties had developed

a programme specifically related to women, whose potential effectiveness and sincerity one can try to assess. Within their separate women's organisations a pattern is visible, whereby the members fought for some degree of independence from and recognition by the central organisation. Women in the National Socialists, however, had considerably more independence in choosing their political allies, but this was a result of the opportunist policies of their party.

The basic problems faced by women in both parties were those inherent in the organisation of women as a component of a mass party compounded, inevitably, by the restrictions on women's political activity in the Austrian Empire. Their scope and effectiveness were additionally circumscribed by the attitudes of the male leadership and the guidelines of official policy. The desirability of organising women was generally accepted, but reading between the lines of the debates on how to put this into practice one can see that in fact this acceptance did not penetrate very far. The comparatively well-documented history of the women's organisation within the Social Democratic party illustrates this point. There was considerable ambivalence about the role women should play within the party; should they, indeed, have a special function of drawing in and educating other women, or not? Were they and their needs different from men's, and if so what did this imply? Should they organise separately in order to overcome these differences, or should they take the lead from men and join men's organisations, hoping thus to overcome the handicap of female backwardness? It was generally agreed that women were less susceptible to political organisation than men, and had less staying power. With their lower

wages and lack of skill they could afford to strike even less than men; moreover, they were usually employed in the least organised sectors of the economy. Drawing women into Social Democracy was, therefore, a complicated process, and some male comrades clearly thought that it did not justify the effort expended. The usual argument expounded in favour of organising women in the early years of Czech Social Democracy was that a backward woman would hold her man back; for his sake she should be won over.<sup>8</sup> Although the arguments in favour of involving women in politics slowly became less opportunistic, the view that women Social Democrats expected too much special consideration from their male comrades remained a common one. If women did need special treatment and separate groups, this was hard to achieve within the framework of a mass organisation like Social Democracy. The precise hierarchical structure left little room for the positive discrimination women seem to have thought they deserved.

Belonging to a separate organisation within a mass party inevitably brought with it other conflicts. Co-operation with non-socialist organisations was generally forbidden. Czech Social Democratic women were therefore unable to work with middle class feminists over, for example, the suffrage campaign. Their isolation tended to weaken their position and provided an opportunity for their rivals, the National Socialists, to step in.

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8. One example of this is a popular Social Democratic pamphlet translated from the German into Czech, Výstraha pro ženy a dívky všech stavů (A warning for women and girls of all classes.) by A. Hoffmann, (Brno, 1894).



The programme of Czech Social Democracy relating to women, adopted at Hainfeld in 1889, was identical to the demands on the subject put forward at the founding conference of the Second International in Paris in the same year. It followed the line which we have seen Bebel favoured in emphasising the need to protect women, and consisted of a demand that women be excluded from branches of work which were "harmful to the female organism" and a demand for equal pay. Demands for equal rights and a detailed elaboration of the protection at work which women required were only added later. Few women were members of Social Democratic parties at the time, and this programme was agreed on, as far as one can see, without any consultation with them. Two of the women who were present at the Paris congress in the German delegation, Klara Zetkin and Emma Ihrer, voted against the resolutions and opposed the concept of special protective legislation for women, arguing that women should not be given any protection which was not given to men also, since this would inevitably put them at a disadvantage on the labour market. They only accepted the programme four years later, at the congress of Zurich (1893).<sup>9</sup> The previous history of the demand for protective legislation does seem to justify some of their misgivings.<sup>10</sup> At this early stage there was also dissatisfaction with Social Democratic policy on women's political rights. The resolution on universal suffrage agreed in 1889 demanded only universal suffrage "for all citizens", with no proviso about "no distinction of sex". At the Brussels

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9. Charles Sowerwine, Women and socialism in France, PhD thesis, (Wisconsin, 1973), p. 78.

10. See next page.

10. The demand that women be prohibited from working in jobs which were harmful to their health began life as a demand simply to restrict women's work outside the home, which emerged from debates within the German social democratic party in the 1860's. Of the two strands in German socialism one, the Lassallean, had always been identified with hostility to women's work outside the home, and its vision of socialism had specified a family wage and the return of women to their rightful place. Theoretically the other, Marxist, strand should have followed Marx in taking a more positive view of women's labour but in practice the resolution passed at their first conference (Eisenach, 1869), demanded the 'restriction' of female and child labour. They had wanted to demand its prohibition, but realised that the process had gone too far for this demand to be realistic. When the two strands eventually merged at Gotha in 1875 this demand was replaced by one which was more limited in its aims; now it called only for the prohibition of work which was "morally or physically harmful" to women. In this form the demand remained. (Werner Thonnessen, The emancipation of women, Germany 1863-1933, (London, 1973), pp. 28-42. Jacqueline Heinem, "De la Iere a la 3 eme Internationale, la question des femmes", Critique communiste, dec 77/jan 78, pp. 108-190). In fact the contemporary programme of the Czech and Austrian parties, (Brevnov and Neudorf1, 1878, Brno, 1882), did not even go this far but demanded the restriction of women's work.

congress in 1891, on the initiative of Zetkin and Ihrer a German delegate put forward a resolution that a demand for "equal civil and political rights for both sexes" be included in the Second International programme. It was passed. Only in 1900 was a specific demand for universal suffrage for women added. The programme of protective legislation, which had started off as a move to restrict women's employment, was gradually expanded to include demands for maternity leave and women factory inspectors. It always remained the principal focus of Social Democratic activity on the woman question. Apart from their formal commitment to equal rights for women, the parties of the Second International paid little attention to the struggle for equal rights in practice. It soon transpired that the fight for women's suffrage was seen as a secondary matter by most Social Democratic parties, three of whom actually dropped the demand for fear of prejudicing the achievement of manhood suffrage.<sup>11</sup> It was tacitly acknowledged that individual parties were free to adopt an independent line on the question.

During the early years of the Social Democratic party, when it was formulating the outlines of future policy on women the general attitude towards women in the party seems to have been one of incomprehension or indifference. Although a policy on women was a necessity according to the tenets of Marxist theory, the party had very few women members and little firm intention of applying

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11. One was the Belgian party, which dropped the demand for women's suffrage when it was adopted by the clerical party in 1902. (Amy Hackett, "The German women's movement and the suffrage", in: Modern European Social History, ed: P. Bezucha, (Lexington, 1972), p. 359. The others were the Austrian and the Swedish.



their policy in practice - at the congress of Hainfeld, the one woman delegate was asked to leave and send a male replacement.<sup>12</sup> Since women formed an insignificant part of the organisation their demands were not considered particularly important. In any case, if the liberation of women was bound to accompany the liberation of the working class the need to do something about it was not so pressing.

A similar conflict between the demands made in the party programme and the actual feelings of party members can be seen in the evolution of the National Socialist party programme. A women's section, or at least a distinct line on women was a vital constituent of any policy which attempted to combat Social Democracy. Part of the programme which was agreed at the first National Socialist party conference (1898) dealt with the woman question but it was as confused and incomplete as the rest. It demanded universal suffrage for all without distinction of sex, and announced that 'women will in all fields be placed on an equal level with men'. Echoing the Social Democratic programme it demanded that women and children be banned from doing harmful work:<sup>13</sup> demands for maternity leave and special treatment for pregnant women were only introduced later.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the Social Democrats, the National Socialists had a 'moral' section in their programme. The Social Democratic line that women could emancipate themselves by engaging in productive labour

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12. Adelheid Popp, Der Weg zur Höhe, (Vienna, 1930), p. 14.

13. From a report of the conference in Československý dělnický obzor, 15th April, 1898.

14. At the next congress, in 1900, Česká demokracie, 20th April, 1900.

outside the home had frequently led their opponents to accuse them of wanting to destroy the family and institute free love. This of course the Social Democrats were at pains to refute, but they cannot have been entirely successful. The National Socialists were anxious to establish themselves in the eyes of the working class as the party of morality and respectable family life. They declared that they would ban prostitution and remove its causes, and that they would refuse to tolerate 'concubinage'. Their views on the moral responsibilities of women were strict:

"Women must be included in moral education. A healthy family life must be achieved, which will be possible when, in view of the above-mentioned economic and social questions, men will be able to establish a family hearth, having sufficient opportunities to earn money."<sup>15</sup>

In other words, they wanted to win a family wage and abolish women's waged work, an idea which was hardly consistent with their earlier demand to afford women equal rights 'in all fields'.

The debate inside both parties was not so much concerned with the inadequacies, real or imagined, of party programmes, but the basic problems of organisation; women's place within the party structure and the need to attract a substantial following. Both parties went through similar arguments in this respect, though they are much more fully documented in the case of the Social Democrats. It is also important to examine the question in a wider context; the impact which these women had on their parties, on general policy and attitudes, and the extent to which they were allowed political independence.

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15. Ceskoslovenský dělnický obzor, 15th April, 1898.

### The Social Democrats

The German Social Democratic party had started a women's journal in 1890 (Die Arbeiterin, renamed Die Gleichheit in 1891, when Klara Zetkin took over as editor.) The Austrian party must have been impressed by this, for in 1892 two women's journals were founded.

The German one - Arbeiterinnenzeitung - started as a monthly supplement to the Viennese workers' paper Arbeiterzeitung, and only later became independent. Its editor was the head of the Austrian Social Democratic women's organisation, Adelheid Popp. Its Czech counterpart, Ženský list, started as an independent monthly produced in Brno (then the centre of Czech socialist organisation) by a collective of women, mostly wives of leading Social Democrats.

The function of both journals was agitation and propagands: they did not reflect the desires of an existing organisation but, rather, set out to create one. There were already a few groups of organised women in Bohemia and Moravia; for example, a 'Union of women wool trade workers' in Brno,<sup>16</sup> but this was only a small beginning.

When more women became interested in Social Democracy the question of their relationship to the party would inevitably arise. A great deal of energy was expended in trying to define this relationship and find the organisational forms which would suit it best. Since the women's organisation never grew as people felt it should do, its failure was attributed at least partly to organisational shortcomings. The basic question was whether women should organise independently of men or jointly with them. "Joint" organisation, however, seems to have been understood as having women's sections in men's societies, as opposed to completely separate, "independent" organisation.

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16. See below, p.



The problems which the women's organisation faced in its relationship to the party as a whole were compounded by the fact that, by law, women were forbidden to belong to 'political societies!'.<sup>17</sup> Though they could belong to educational clubs and trade unions, or form 'free political associations', they could not be direct members of the party, and so they were unable to participate in the organisation on an equal basis with men.

In the early 1890's this had yet to present a problem. Social Democratic organisation was extremely disparate: workers belonged to several different types of society, and were bound together not by any formal structure but simply by an acceptance of the Hainfeld programme. Women could and did belong to these societies, though they were rarely admitted on equal terms with men.<sup>18</sup> By 1894 there were three trade unions which admitted women, as well as two independent women's societies and one all-woman trade union.<sup>19</sup> In these early years it was considered enough to impress on women the desirability of joining the Social Democrats and leave the form of organisation entirely up to them. Realistically, there was probably little else the already overworked editors of Ženský list could do. But by 1895

17. Under paragraph 30 of the Vereinsgesetz, 1867.

18. Eight men's educational societies admitted women. (Ženský list, (1893), 7.)

19. Ibid. The three trade unions which admitted women were the textile works, milliners' and printers' aids unions in Brno. The all-woman union was the union of women wool trade workers in Brno. The societies were the educational societies 'Vlasta' in Prostějov and 'Osvěta' in Humpolec. In fact, there seem to have been more than these, for example, one at Rákovník, (Ženský list, (1893), 2). A women's group in Prague met at U Pstrosu - a popular venue for left-wing societies - but the meetings were soon made difficult by the police.

women were beginning to feel that there should be a general party policy on the question. There was a need not only to control the slowly increasing numbers of women members but to give the women's sections a definite status within the party hierarchy. The issue was first raised in a discussion in Ženský list in 1895. Contributors to the discussion generally approved of the existing state of affairs whereby most women in the party formed independent societies; what they wanted to change was the form of these societies and their potential membership in line with the general trend within the Czech party away from educational societies to 'general trade unions' (všeodborové spolky), which would attract women because they were workers. A structure for these societies was suggested whereby they could set up centres in large towns and then branches elsewhere. Like all unions they would be members of the Trade Union Association (Odborové Sdružení Československé) but would be self-governing.<sup>20</sup>

The first organisation on this model was set up in Brno in 1896. Brno had previously been the headquarters of the only women's trade union, the 'Union of women wool trade workers', which had been dissolved in 1895 with the unfulfilled hope that its members would join men's trade unions.<sup>21</sup> The establishment of the 'Association of

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20. Ženský list (1895), 22. It was decided that these societies should not, as a rule, be differentiated according to the type of work their members did, though in large towns, where there were a lot of members, some differentiation might be possible. "All these workers, whatever kind of work they do, have the same desire - to 'improve their position': why then should they not be able to work together in one society?"

21. The 'Union of women wool trade workers' was not a Social Democratic union, although there seem to have been some Social Democratic women involved in it. It was started in 1888 and had 70-80 members. Apparently lack of money forced it to remain relatively inactive, and this was one of the reasons for its closure in 1895. (Ženský list (1894), 2, and R. Wohlgemuthová, "Účast žen v českém sociální demokracie" CsCH, 1965, p. 407.)

women and girls', as the new organisation was known, must have been partly a response to this failure, an attempt to win these women back to political activity. The Association had numerous different functions, though for the purposes of the law of association there was no reference in its statutes to political education or activity. It intended to look after the material interests of its members and attract women by providing various incentives; unemployment benefit, for example. It was also meant to be educational, organising lectures and classes and setting up a library. One of its most important functions would be to encourage other groups to set up branches - any area with more than twenty interested women could set up a branch. Ženský list devoted much space to explaining how this should be done.<sup>22</sup>

However, it appears that, despite their broad base and the material benefits they could offer, these Associations were not popular as an organisational form. Five altogether were recorded as having been set up though the only ones which lasted were those in Brno and in Smíchov and Žižkov, (industrial districts of Prague) which lasted until 1900, 1906 and 1908 respectively. After 1905 the form survived with only slight changes in the women servants' trade union set up in 1905, the Society of women and girls employed in domestic work and industry.<sup>23</sup>

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22. Ženský list, (1896), 15.

23. The Brno association closed down in 1900 when the centre of the Social Democratic women's organisation moved to Prague. (Wohlgemuthová, "Účast...", p. 407). The demise of the Smíchov and Žižkov associations, in 1906 and 1908 respectively, was due not to lack of members - they each had about 100 - but to a change in party policy, away from supporting such organisations. Their activity was concentrated on giving lectures on the position of women, and on social democracy in general rather than the mutual assistance which characterised the Brno association. (SÚA. PP/V 1893-9 25/168; PP/V 1900-7 25/30; 13/28.)



Trying to organise women independently on the basis of work obviously did not yield the results for which Social Democratic women had been hoping and another approach was suggested by the women's conference which met in December 1897.<sup>24</sup> The twenty delegates there agreed to suggest to the 1898 party congress that a women's executive committee be set up. This would be elected at a women's conference and would be responsible for agitational work and for producing Ženský list. The conference recommended that autonomous women's sections be started within every trade union and educational club, and that the statutes of these clubs be changed to facilitate this if necessary.<sup>25</sup> This recommendation was a compromise between the views of different groups; Ženský list favoured completely independent organisations for women whereas other women, notably those in Prague, were doubtful about the efficiency of independent organisation and preferred joint organisation with men.<sup>26</sup> The decision to set up women's sections was approved by the general party congress of 1898: under the heading 'Women's organisation' the stenographer recorded:

"The complaints of our active female comrades do not diminish, although at every conference there have been many pointed words about men's lack of activity in awakening and organising women."<sup>27</sup>

These complaints were to continue for many years, as were the organisational difficulties which the women thought they had solved; although party policy had been unified in 1898, practice was far

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24. It was the first socialist women's conference in Austria.

25. Ženský list, (1898), I.

26. Právo lidu, 14th April, 1898.

27. Zpráva k III sjezdu čsl. strany sociálně demokratické, (1898).

behind it. We have seen that different areas had different opinions on organisation, and it is probable that they continued to do what they thought best. There seems to have been little regular co-ordination or co-operation between the groups in Prague and Brno. For instance, in 1899 the women's movement was split by a dispute over Ženský list which was only resolved by the party executive committee's formally expelling some of the editorial board from the party.<sup>28</sup> Membership was small, perhaps two or three thousand, and there were no paid organisers or financial support from the party. Ženský list was run from Brno because this was then the area with the most members and had the largest income from subscriptions. Its party organisation was entirely responsible for keeping Ženský list going: it was their unwillingness to shoulder the financial burden any longer which led to the suggestion in 1897 that the paper be moved to Prague and the editorial board changed.<sup>29</sup>

The content of Ženský list during the first eight years of its existence (1892-1900) was agitational rather than theoretical.

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28. The details of the quarrel are not entirely clear. At the women's conference of 1897 it had been decided to move Ženský list to Prague and appoint Karla Máchová as its editor. Responsibility for the paper was transferred from the Brno organisation to the new Women's Executive Committee, based in Prague. However, it appears that the actions of the new women's executive committee did not please the old editorial board. Having failed initially to secure Máchová as editor the committee wanted to appoint a man, F. Dvořák. The Brno organisation, however, refused to recognise Dvořák and to hand over Ženský list to the executive committee, and appointed a new executive committee from among its members. Eventually the party executive intervened and expelled some of the Brno women. In 1900 Ženský list was finally moved to Prague and edited by Máchová: in the intervening period, 1899-1900, it was produced by the women's executive committee members in Brno. It appears that part of the animosity between the two groups stemmed from their different approaches to organisation. (Ženský list, (1899), 8, 9 and 10. Právo lidu, 12th May, 1899).
29. Apparently it had been complaining about this since 1894. (Právo lidu, 12th May, 1899).



Articles concentrated on the basic issues - what is socialism, what is the woman question, and gave information on, for example, women in other countries and women's working conditions. Considerable space was devoted to explaining the history and aims of the Social Democratic party. The two editors, Mina Hybešová and Terézie Toužilová were the wives of prominent Social Democrats. Other women who played an important part in the movement were also identifiably the wives of party leaders.<sup>30</sup> We have no means of knowing whether they were representative of the rest of their membership, for assessments of the strength of the socialist women's movement were very varied. Some complained that it was composed mainly of single women and that it did not cater for the needs of older, married women,<sup>31</sup> while others complained that it was too heavy with married women and badly needed to attract young single women, the majority of the industrial workforce.

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30. Mina Hybešová was the wife of Josef Hybeš, one of the founders of the Social Democratic party in Moravia. She had a small drapers' shop in Brno. Terézie Toužilová was married to František Toužil, head of the Vršovice organisation (in Prague), and prospective Social Democratic candidate to the Reichsrat on several occasions. Their daughter, Božena Toužilová, was also a very active Social Democrat and was, for example, women's representative on the party executive committee in 1902. Božena Krapková, the wife of Josef Krapka, a Viennese Social Democratic leader. Anna Steinerová (1871-1921) the wife of Josef Steiner. He was elected to the Reichsrat in 1897 and edited Dělnické listy in Vienna till 1905. In that year he became head of the Czech trade union organisation in Prague. His constituency was Kládno Smíchov, where Steinerová was active as an agitator during the big miners' strike of 1900. Josefa Skaloudová (? - 1904) She was the Czech women delegate to the Zurich congress of the Second International, 1893, and was a founder of the socialist women's movement in Prague.
31. An article in Právo lidu (14th August, 1896) pointed out: "Hitherto it has been the case that our educational and leisure societies have not managed to attract a reasonable number of women, undoubtedly because meetings and other events they organise happen in men's free time, in the evening or at night." The writer suggested that if women were allowed to form their own organisations they could arrange the meetings at times which suited them.



In any case, the need for socialist men to educate their wives to socialism was a constant theme of articles and speeches, and the most common justification for the existence of a socialist women's movement was still that a backward women would hold her man back.

At the second Social Democratic women's conference in 1900 the decision was taken to move Ženský list to Prague and appoint Karla Máchová as editor.\* It was hoped that the move would change the journal for the better and attract more readers. The price was reduced, and the party agreed to pay Máchová a salary of 40K per month. Thus Ženský list, which had been the official women's paper since 1898, came more closely under the control of the nascent party administration and the likelihood of embarrassing and divisive disputes was minimised. Though in theory this move might have involved a loss of editorial freedom, in practice its editorial policy had hardly been very daring. Now at least the party was financially committed to keeping the women's organisation going. The change was probably more significant in terms of personalities; Máchová was a different type of editor from Hybešová or Toužilová. Not only was she single, rather than married to a Social Democratic leader, but she had travelled widely and was well educated. She had trained as a teacher, had educated herself politically, knew German well<sup>32</sup> and was an external student at Masaryk's philosophy classes for four years (1897-1901). To the content of Ženský list she added a new dimension, printing articles on a much wider range of subjects than had formerly been considered

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\* For a biographical note, see Appendix 1.

32. She had written an article on Marx's theory of value for Budoucnost in 1881 and had translated Schaffle's 'The crime of socialism'.  
AUD KSC Máchová, Denník z mého života.

necessary: on housing and medical care, what women needed and what could be done to improve existing facilities, for example, or on the need for marriage law reform. She gave a great deal more space to news of the emerging middle class women's movement, especially among women students. But although her approach made Ženský list a more interesting paper, it was still by no means 'popular'. There was still a number of people within the party, generally men, who criticised it for being too remote from women's everyday concerns. It was too political and highbrow, they said; it should carry articles on subjects which really interested women, cooking, sewing and so on.<sup>33</sup> These critics tended to blame Ženský list for the failure of the socialist women's movement to expand, but in fact the reasons for this were much more deep rooted. Women were, after all, unlikely to commit themselves to a socialist women's movement just because they liked the knitting patterns in the socialist women's paper.<sup>34</sup>

The slow growth of the socialist women's movement was a continual problem. At every party congress and women's conference complaints about men's lack of co-operation and women's lack of response were

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33. There were occasionally complaints about this at conferences and motions that it should be changed. At the 1909 party congress a motion was passed suggesting that Ženský list should carry articles on housekeeping, clothes and shopping. (Protokol IX sjezdu čsl. s.d. strany dělnické ve dnech 4 až 8 září 1909, pp. 179 and 251). Similar views were voiced at the 1913 congress. The speaker implied that Ženský list was too political and suggested that, instead of trying to imitate Právo lidu it should address itself more to women's special concerns. (Právo lidu 9th December, 1913).

34. Circulation of Ženský list:

1892	1800	copies monthly
1898	2500	
1900	3800	
1908	9000	copies fortnightly
1913	800	

reiterated. The solution to the problem in 1900 had been to move back in the direction of separatism - the establishment of an agitational committee to supervise independent women's societies and sections and to provide experienced agitators to guide the rank and file. But by the next congress in 1902 women had to admit defeat:

"We have done what we could, but we could not fulfil our responsibilities. We had no money, we had no people. You yourselves complain about how difficult it is to work without money - we were far worse off. People tell us we should organise women factory workers, but who should organise them?"<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, the task of winning over the masses of women could not be achieved without material assistance. The women's agitational committee did not, however, ask for this, but rather abandoned the principle of separate organisation, declaring that women should become members of trade unions or local party organisations, whose responsibility it would be to organise meetings for women at convenient times. The principle of separate women's conferences was also abandoned, not to be revived until 1908. They sought to overcome resistance to the women's organisation by integrating women into the men's organisation more completely, demanding "due representation" of women on every level of the party hierarchy,<sup>36</sup>

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35. Právo lidu, 5th November, 1902. Strnadová, from the Smíchov organisation was speaking.

36. "On all representative bodies, on the committees of local organisations, area committees, provincial representative committees and the executive committee of the party women should have due representation. Their delegates must maintain contact with all centres of women's organisation, and establish contact with places where the preconditions for agitation among women exist; to carry this out and to direct women into societies established on the basis of international association." (Resolution of the Women's Agitation Committee passed by the 1902 party congress, quoted in Wohlgemuthová, "Účast..." p. 410.)



but they achieved only a statutory woman on the party executive committee.<sup>37</sup> By the next party congress in 1904, however, there were still no reports of startling leaps forward in female membership. A new explanation was found for this:

"So far it is impossible to detect any significant successes in the women's movement because it lacks a base, that is, women organised in trade unions. Attempts are made in this sphere, but they do not usually develop into more than attempts."<sup>38</sup>

This statement overlooked that fact that at the last congress great emphasis had been placed precisely on organising women in trade unions.

By 1906 the picture had changed. The agitation for universal suffrage which had been going on since the end of 1904 and was now about to be crowned with success had effected an impressive increase in the number of men and women Social Democrats. The old structure was inadequate to cope with this and a special congress was held in 1907 to formulate new statutes. The corollary of increased female membership was increased demands; women now wanted statutory representatives in the party hierarchy and at congresses even when their numbers were inadequate to guarantee this. In this they were unsuccessful, but at least they obtained a structure which corresponded to the party structure on every level.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Božena Toužilová was elected to this post.

38. Zpráva k 6. sjezdu čsl. strany sociálně demokratické, (1904).

39. At the top was the provincial agitation committee, supervising all the other organisations and doing agitational work at the province level. It had the authority to call its own conferences if it wished. Below that was the district women's committee, responsible to the district party committee and below these, on the lowest level, were the "local agitational circles", responsible to the local party committee.

But this again solved nothing. The rate of growth in membership over the 1906-8 period was not sustained; membership for 1908-14 remained on approximately the same level. A final attempt to solve the problem was made in 1911 with the formation of a 'Provincial women's secretariat' in Prague. This, according to its supporters:

"... would conduct the agenda of the women's movement, a moving spirit to strengthen and develop it, a moral support to all women comrades in the countryside. Our organisation of socialist women has as yet no firm nucleus of experienced women and so we must continually work hard to educate our ranks."<sup>40</sup>

It had, however, no noticeable effect on female membership in the next few years.<sup>41</sup>

Part of the women's failure to make an impact can perhaps be ascribed to male resistance, lack of practical sympathy and co-operation. In the party congress reports there are two complaints, constantly repeated, which seem to bear this assertion out. One is that male Social Democrats did not try to interest their wives in socialism and more particularly in the women's organisation. This came up at nearly every congress from 1898-1911, and was usually expressed in the same way. For example, in the words of Máchová at the 1909 party congress:

"Every comrade must become an agitator, and he must consider it his serious duty to bring his wife to socialist consciousness and turn her away from old opinions. (Agreement) If a man cannot manage to put across our ideas in his own surroundings, to his wife, if he cannot manage to explain to her the significance of political and trade union organisation, their importance for the future of the proletariat,

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40. Report of socialist women's conference in 190. Právo lidu, 27th and 28th December, 1910.

41. For membership figures, see below.



how can he desire to have any influence outside his own family? (Quite so!) It's no good making excuses that there's no time for this. Every comrade has that much time. And if people say today that women are the most difficult to organise that is only proof that our comrades have not, so far, understood their duty."<sup>42</sup>

Agreement may have been expressed in the hall but the suggestions were probably only rarely implemented in socialist homes. In a similar debate in 1900, Antonín Němec had explained the problems:

"Leading male comrades are always being attacked because their wives are not active in agitational work. If any leading comrade also had to have the sort of wife that goes to meetings he would put his family at great risk. Our wives must not be agitators."<sup>43</sup>

To complain that the wives of people like Němec were not active, although in fact most prominent Social Democratic women were married to 'leading male comrades', enabled women to attack prejudice against women within Czech Social Democracy without having to be openly critical of the party. The constant repetition of the issue makes one suspect that it was more than just a question of a few leaders' wives. Failure to spread the word at home, educate their wives and daughters, must have been symptomatic of their lack of interest.

The other perennial complaint of socialist women was that they were inadequately represented on party organs and at congresses.

42. Speech by Karla Máchová to the 1909 party congress. Protokoly IX sjezdu... p. 111.) An almost identical speech was made at the 1913 party congress by a delegate from Plzeň, Píková. She said that at the last congress a clause had been added to the party statutes saying that a comrade's first responsibility was to make sure that his wife was organised. However, this had not happened; on the contrary, at recent demonstrations organised by the women for women's suffrage men had been conspicuous by their absence and their failure to agitate among women. (Právo lidu, 11th Dec. 1913)
43. Report of 1900 party congress. Právo lidu, 9th September, 1900. (Němec said the same thing again in 1902.)



Until the actual number of congress representatives to which women were entitled was enshrined in the party statutes of 1907 it was up to the majority of male members whether women were elected as delegates or not. At the congresses of 1900 and 1902 women demanded 'due representation' (přiměřené zastoupení) on all party organs, partly to enable them to co-ordinate the activities of the women's sections with those of the rest of the party. At both congresses resolutions were passed which were designed to press local party organisations to do something about it, evidently without much success. An index of the extent of co-operation between the women's organisation and the party on a local level was the number of women delegated sent by local organisations to the party congress. Again, the fact that few women delegates were sent, even by large organisations which had the right to send two delegates, one of whom could have been a woman, was a cause for complaint.

The 1907 statutes went some way towards improving the situation by giving women in large organisations a right to statutory delegates, but this came nowhere near what, for example, Karla Máchová was demanding - one delegate for every hundred organised women in an electoral district - whether or not they were in one organisation.<sup>44</sup>

Even after 1907, however, there were still complaints that women were not getting the representation they were entitled to.<sup>45</sup> The choice of representatives was in the hands of the predominantly male local organisation: the fact that they did not choose women even when entitled and encouraged to do so is surely significant.

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44. Protokol VIII sjezdu čsl. soc. dem. strany dělnické. (Plzeň, 1907).

45. Karla Máchová complained of it at the 1909 party congress. (Protokoly IX sjezdu, pp. 110, 115.)

Other forms of activity for socialist women which were not directly linked to the party were often more successful, although on a much smaller scale. In 1905 women in Prague, inspired by Karla Máchová, set up a women's trade union along the lines of the Smíchov and Žižkov 'Associations of women and girls'. The new group, the 'Society of women and girls employed in domestic work and industry' was aimed at two highly exploited groups of women workers, domestic servants and home workers. These were the members whom Social Democracy was most anxious to attract, but due to their isolation and the conditions in which they worked they were hardly susceptible to organisation. The Society hoped to provide material benefits for its members, particularly support during illness or unemployment and help in finding work with 'good' families. It also provided a library and organised lectures, but as far as one can tell from the distribution of its funds it did not attempt to be political in the short term, but rather concentrated on being of material use to its members.<sup>46</sup>

The Society was based in Prague and had up to 20 branches in the surrounding area. The most distant branch was that in Plzeň. Membership of the branches varied, and some were tiny. The total number of members was, on average, about five hundred, thus making

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46. The overwhelming proportion of its funds were always devoted to supporting members in illness. Next on the list of financial priorities came contributions to Ženský list. Money for "agitation" came next, but only took half to one third of the money spent on sickness benefit. (SUA.PP/V 1908-13. 49/3. UAD KSC 1/3. 289).

it one of the largest of Czech women's societies.<sup>47</sup> There were sub-sections for women engaged in different types of domestic industry and one for domestic servants, but it is hard to tell how successful it was in attracting these women since membership lists are hard to find. It served as a training ground for many women agitators who later became prominent in the Communist Party women's movement in the 1920's, (Anna Malá, Luisa Landová Štychová) so perhaps it was seen as in some ways an alternative to working within the ordinary women's organisation.

To attach blame to organisational inadequacies, and to imagine that the problem could be solved by slight shifts in the balance of power was unrealistic. Changes had been made, different approaches had been tried, but they had not made any lasting difference. The failure of the Czech socialist women's movement to expand was symptomatic of something more than insufficient organisation. While male Social Democrats became increasingly irritated at what they saw as the women's failure to take responsibility for the future of their own organisation, women felt that they did not take them and the special difficulties involved in organising women

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47. SÚA. PP/V 1908-13. 49/3; also statistics in Časopis odborového sdružení československého (1906-1913).

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Branches</u>	<u>Members</u>
1906	12	700
1907	19	495
1908	20	407
1909	14	480
1910	16	420
1911	8	511
1912	8	490
1913	9	536



seriously. Such fundamental criticisms were never expressed openly:

Karla Máchová voiced them in her recollections, which were never published in full:

"There is not much one can write about the women's movement. It remained stationary, and this was in no way the fault of the women themselves. It was the men who bore the greatest responsibility for this because they attached no importance to the women's organisation, and their answer always was, 'For us the organisation of men comes before that of women.' They did not recognise the necessity (of organising women) even when the number of women in organisations grew. Again and again they dismissed women with sneers until finally the war brought women flooding into the workforce. Perhaps this taught them what an unorganised woman in the working class means."<sup>48</sup>

As an example of the lack of interest paid to the women's organisation Máchová cited the small amount of money which it was meant to exist on. The 40K per month she was paid when she took over the editorship did not even cover the basic necessities of life, she recollected, let alone the foreign journals and writing materials she was expected to buy, so that she had to augment her income by private teaching. The women's organisation had to pay for heating and lighting the one small room from which it had to operate. Considering these conditions, Máchová thought, they expected the women to work miracles. By the end of her life she seems to have come to the conclusion that if women wanted to achieve anything they would have to do it by themselves:

"There is no party which really means what it says about the woman question. The party always has to get something out of it, so I warn women not to rely on men in anything. The only thing which lasts is that which women fight for themselves... Women must not wait, as if men were going to bring them

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48. AÚD KSČ. Máchová "Denník z mého života", p. 9.

something on a silver platter. We have had enough of waiting... Don't believe words, demand actions... There is no campaign which you hope will be successful where a man is not lying in wait for you in order to claim it as his own. The best paid jobs, the most advantageous positions, are taken by men, and all the subordinate and worst paid jobs are good enough for women."<sup>49</sup>

The number of women organised in the Social Democratic party is not unimpressive (about 5,000, on average), but all concerned obviously felt that this was not enough. The party's failure to attract more of a following should also be examined in terms of the challenge posed by the middle class feminist movement, in particular the suffrage movement; and the Social Democrats' response to it. The National Socialists, by comparison, were able to use the suffrage movement much more effectively. We have already observed that the agitation for universal suffrage made many converts to Social Democracy. Women played a noticeable part in all the demonstrations that took place in October and November 1905, and huge numbers of women in Prague and all over the country attended meetings to discuss what particular part they as women should play in this struggle.<sup>50</sup> A meeting of 8,000 women at Kladno, a mining town outside Prague, always a centre of socialist agitation, agreed on the following resolution, which combined strong Social Democratic fervour with the plea that the party not forget women at this point:

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49. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

50. For further details of the suffrage movement in general and the part which socialist women played in it, see Chapter 6. During the agitation for universal suffrage, as during other important campaigns the Social Democrats made full use of their experienced women agitators all over the country. Thus, for example, we find Božena Toužilová from Prague campaigning in Moravská Ostrava, Máchová in Plzeň, and so on.

"In the fight for universal, direct and equal suffrage, in which we have so far participated in our thousands, we are determined to go on, with our men, to the limits. In order that universal, direct and equal suffrage may be enacted as soon as possible without any limitations, we will urge our husbands, sons and brothers into battle and strengthen their resolve to fight, and we will obey every instruction of the leadership of the Social Democratic party.

We energetically demand that it be not forgotten that women, who contribute equally to society and are equally desirous of freedom and enlightenment still have no political rights.

We demand the removal of the antediluvian provision of the law of association which decrees that women and minors may not be members of political societies. We demand the introduction of universal, direct, equal and secret suffrage for men and women.

As a means to the achievement of political rights for women and the granting of universal equal suffrage for women, especially working women... we recommend that they join Social Democratic political organisations, in order that in these organisations, where a woman can be equally as effective as a man, they should direct their efforts towards seeing that the Social Democratic party determinedly takes up the fight for equal rights for women..."<sup>51</sup>

Though these women were anxious that their demands should not be disregarded, the party leadership does not seem to have been particularly interested in pressing their claims. At some point early in 1906 it decided formally to stop campaigning for women's suffrage and to concentrate on manhood suffrage. It was argued that to demand women's suffrage, which was unlikely to be granted, would only complicate the achievement of manhood suffrage unnecessarily.

Moreover, the whole issue of votes for women was linked with the middle class feminists, whom the Social Democrats officially deplored. In any case, the argument ran, once Social Democratic

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51. SÚA PM 1901-10. 8/1/23/1, printed in Kodědová, Rok 1905.



representatives were elected to the Reichsrat under the universal franchise, they would of course do their utmost to obtain votes for women.<sup>52</sup>

The decision to abandon the demand for women's suffrage to the Reichsrat meant that Social Democratic women could no longer participate in the all-party women's suffrage campaign, which had started in December 1905, and in which they had been very active.<sup>53</sup> Máchová was a founder member (along with Fraňa Zeminová, the National Socialist) of the Women's Suffrage Committee. Their limited co-operation with the middle class feminist movement was unlikely to be welcomed by the Social Democratic leadership, but it seems possible that, had it not later been expressly forbidden, it might well have continued.<sup>54</sup>

After 1907, with manhood suffrage safely achieved, the Social Democrats again permitted their women members to agitate for the vote, though now the focus of suffrage struggles had been transferred from the Reichsrat to the Bohemian Diet, still operating under a restricted fourcurial franchise. The campaign of Social Democracy was to achieve universal suffrage to the Diet: women's demands were

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52. Ženský list, (1906) 24.

53. This decision by the Austrian Social Democratic party was strongly criticised at the international socialist women's congress in Stuttgart, 1907. (R Ya Tsiurulnik, "Pervye mezhdunarodniye zhenskiye sotsialisticheskiye konferentsii", in: Iz istorii rabochego klassa i revolyutsion ego dvizheniya. Pamyati akadmika A.M. Pankratovoy (sbornik statyei), (Moscow, 1958) pp. 719-731.

54. But in fact Máchová seems to have continued to attend some meetings of the Women's Suffrage Committee till the end of 1907.

generally subsumed into this greater goal. There was thus little basis for an independent campaign by Social Democratic women, and they were continually over-shadowed by the Women's Suffrage Committee.

By now, the women's suffrage movement had had time to establish itself: it had an organisational base, the Women's Suffrage Committee, and public support - 22,000 people signed the first women's suffrage petition. It concentrated its efforts on trying to ensure that woman suffrage was included in the new Diet electoral law. To this end it attempted to get the support of all parties for the women candidates which it put up for election to the Diet. The Social Democrats were wary of co-operating with middle class women on an all-party platform, and they pursued a similar campaign on their own. At the first election where a woman candidate (Marie Tůmová) stood they put up Karla Máchová, though not for the same seat. She won 20% of the vote, more than the feminist candidate. When Máchová stood again, in 1912, it was against Božena Víková Kunětická, the united women's candidate. In the second round of the election, however, she stood down and gave her votes to Víková Kunětická, who was then elected unopposed. On both these occasions the Social Democrats went half way towards playing what could have been a very important role for them and the women's movement as a whole; that is, filling the political gap between the Women's Suffrage Committee and the small, left-of-centre political parties to which many feminists belonged. The committee with its "above parties" stand, gradually lost the support of the women who were organised in parties, who then supported the Social Democrats when that party did anything about women's suffrage, and frequently supported them as an alternative to the Women's Suffrage Committee. If the Social Democrats had

participated in the movement continuously, they might have been able to exert a certain influence on it and push it in the direction of more political commitment, to the detriment of the middle class feminists.

The decline of the Social Democratic women's movement coincided with the growth of the women's suffrage movement (1908-11). There must have been some connection between the two phenomena. Social Democratic women could neither beat the Committee at its own game nor join it; since the suffrage question was the principal political issue to affect women at that time, they were bound to lose. The failure of Social Democracy to capitalise on their popularity among women in 1906-7 can be seen from the membership statistics:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Women organised</u>	<u>in sections</u>
1906	5054	
1907	c.6000	
1908	c.6000	
1909	4948	c.2000
1910	4505	2748
1911	5488	2176

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For the purposes of comparison, the total number of party members in 1906 was 99,098; women, therefore, formed 5.1% of the membership.

These statistics are not accurate; they are drawn from conference reports, which were rarely complete. They do, however, give a clear

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55. Before 1906 women were not generally listed separately in membership reports. These figures are drawn from the reports of the various districts to the party executive committee before each congress, printed in the Zprávy of each congress. None of the reports is absolutely complete but they give a general picture of the situation.



picture of the relative stagnation of the women's movement. This impression is confirmed when one compares these figures with those for the German Austrian women's organisation:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Women organised</u>
1903	700
1908	6412
1911	17823
1912	23090
1913	26058
1914	30000

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### The National Socialist party

It is difficult to gather reliable information on how the National Socialist party put its ideas on women into practice in the early years of its existence. Conference reports do not indicate how many women there were in the party and one is forced to rely on the memoirs of individual women members. These tend to dwell on the joys of being a woman in the National Socialists rather than on the details of day to day organisation and agitation. Investigation becomes a little easier after the appearance of a party women's journal in 1908.

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56. Adelheid Popp, Der Weg Zur Höhe, (Vienna, 1930), p. 92. The women's organisation in Austria only got off the ground in 1908 after the decision to form "free political organisations" in 1907. Popp thought that these should be gatherings of like-minded women, who could use them to gain political confidence, without having any demands put on them by the central organisation. (Der Weg zur Höhe, 86-7; Verhandlung der 3 s.d. Frauenreichs-konferenz in Österreich, (Vienna, 1908), pp. 15-17.

In the first few years after the party's foundation in 1898 no attempt was made to integrate women's organisations into the party. This was partly, no doubt, because the party structure was only beginning to crystallise, but partly also because the women's organisation was small and not very powerful, so that there was no pressing need to harness it to the party. Women were active members from the party's foundation, though we have no idea how many of them there were. Fraňa Zeminová their leader recalled leading a march of women on 1st May 1898.\* As had been the case in the Social Democratic party, women first began to meet under the auspices of the non-political societies founded by men. In 1900 Zeminová started to form "independent women's sections" of the National Socialist party in various places.<sup>57</sup> This of course encountered police opposition and so in 1901 the sections were transformed into the Provincial association for working women and girls. This was designed to be something like the Social Democrats' Association for women and girls - a kind of trade union for women, to give them financial support and education, but also to be a cover for political activity.<sup>58</sup> How successful the association was at first we do not know, because extant police reports on it cover only the period 1908-15. But it seems that, although it claimed to have branches all over the country, its influence did not extend far beyond Prague.<sup>59</sup>

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\* For a biographical note, see Appendix 1.

57. These were set up in Libeň, Vyšehrad, Žižkov, Holešovice - all growing industrial suburbs of Prague - Louny and Mladá Boleslav, within a few hours' journey, and at Prostějov in Moravia. (Padesát let činnosti Frany Zeminové, (Prague, 1947), p. 10.

58. Ibid., pp. 25-28.

59. All the members in 1908-15 seem to have come from Prague or its immediate suburbs, (Vinohrady, Žižkov, Nusle, Vršovice). It is possible that there were branches outside Prague, but there is no record of them. (SUA PP/V. 1908-15. 25/107.)

The memoirs available claim that the first years of the century were ones of unremitting activity for National Socialist women, but it is difficult to find much proof of this. It seems more probable that within a small party with even smaller resources a few women had to work very hard in their spare time to keep their heads above water. (The Social Democrats at least paid a woman organiser though they did not pay her enough to live on.)<sup>60</sup>

In 1905, apparently in response to frequent demands from their members, National Socialist women felt confident enough to launch a women's journal. This was not to be independent, but a women's section of the youth organisation's paper, Mladé proudy (Young currents). It was to be called Dělnice (Working Woman). The decision to appeal to women through the youth organisation of the party is significant for, of all the aspects of National Socialist agitation, the youth organisation probably made the most impact, chiefly because of its antimilitarist campaign. A considerable part of the youth movement's success stemmed from its independence of the party. It was organised as a fraction of the party which, while recognising the party programme, did not accept it as final. This left plenty of room for conflict between it and the party and more than once resulted in its members almost being expelled.<sup>61</sup>

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60. The National Socialist party was very strong in Vienna. A National Socialist organisation was founded in 1898, and seems to have begun to attract women members and deal with issues relating to women after 1900. The attitudes of National Socialists in Vienna towards, for example, woman suffrage seems to have been more sympathetic than that of the Social Democrats. The "Provincial Association for working women and girls" seems to have flourished in Vienna, with 6 branches in 1910. (Monika Glettler, Die Wiener Tschechen, (Munich and Vienna, 1972), p. 135.

61. On the youth movement within National Socialism see: J. Beránek, "Český antimilitarismus před první světovou válkou", Historie a vojenství, 1965.1.



National Socialist women must, therefore, have been trying to exploit the success of the youth movement compared with that of the main organisation. Until the foundation of Ženské snahy in 1908, Mladé proudy and the youth organisation remained the means by which they sought to organise and agitate. Even after 1908 this was still important, especially in places where there was no women's organisation.

One should not, however, get too inflated an idea of the success of this approach. Dělnice ran for only eight issues. It reflected a stereotyped view of the woman question. The articles on women in Mladé proudy before 1905 had usually asked the question - why are no women active in the workers' movement - and come up with one of two answers: either it was the fault of women themselves or it was the fault of men. Dělnice tended to follow this pattern, though articles exhorting women to awake from their slumbers and stressing the necessity of organisation were interspersed with news items on the National Socialist women's organisation. Predictably, much attention was paid to the position of servants and much space devoted to advertising the meetings of the National Socialist servants' organisation. There were few articles not of this propagandistic nature, nothing which would kindle the interest of a woman who might happen to pick the magazine up, and the non-appearance of Dělnice after the end of 1905 presumably means that it had failed to awaken the expected response.

However, the events of 1905-6 marked an important change in the development of the women's organisation. National Socialist women played a noticeable part in the demonstrations for universal suffrage in October and November 1905. At the demonstration in

Prague on November 28th it was actually Fraňa Zeminová who, when none of the speakers mentioned women, led 10,000 women away to the Czech Women's Club where she and other women spoke from a balcony on the need to demand women's suffrage as well.<sup>62</sup> She originated the idea of forming a Women's Suffrage Committee and worked with it for some time.<sup>63</sup> The universal suffrage campaign was marked by a high degree of co-operation between National Socialists and Social Democrats; so, in its first few months, was the women's suffrage campaign in which both parties worked with the leaders of the progressive middle class women's movement to set up the women's suffrage committee. But when the Social Democrats officially abandoned their support for women's suffrage the National Socialists were, of course, able to make considerable political capital. They could now put themselves forward as the workers' party which really had women's interests at heart.

Whatever the extent of their commitment to woman suffrage, the issue undoubtedly brought the National Socialists many new members. Larger numbers prompted the formation of a new type of organisation - women's sections attached to men's political organisations.<sup>64</sup> After 1907 the formalisation of the women's organisation proceeded apace. It must now have had enough members to make it an attractive ally; moreover, women proved their worth by assisting with the party election campaign in 1907 - the first elections under manhood suffrage. The establishment of a women's

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62. Fraňa Zeminová, "Vůdčí hlava čs. feminismu", in: Kniha života, práce a osobnost F. Plamínkové, (Prague, 1935), p. 460.

63. For further details see Chapter

64. Padesát let života a třicet pět let práce Frani Zeminové, (Prague, 1932), pp. 9-44.

central committee in 1907 was generally referred to within the party as if it was a reward for women's help.<sup>65</sup> In 1908 the central committee started to issue a monthly women's journal, Ženské snahy. The period 1908-1909, with the foundation of Ženské snahy and then the first women's conference was the period in which the National Socialist women's movement gradually began to crystallise, although even then it still fell short of its members' expectations.

Ženské snahy ran for seven years, until it was closed down by the police at the outbreak of war in 1914. During that time it changed little in format or approach. Most of the articles dealt with the party or the women's organisation, usually urging women to join one or the other. More general articles usually talked about women in industry or women abroad. They were factual and not analytical; there was little debate. Most discussion within Ženské snahy focussed on the problems of organisation, reflecting, on the one hand, the growing desire of women members for an organisation which, though strong, was relatively independent and, on the other, the wish of the party leadership to have all the sections under its own authority.

From the first two volumes of Ženské snahy it appears that in 1908 National Socialist women were still organised in a variety of ways; some were members of National Socialist trade unions, others were in women's sections of the youth movement or the party or in the Provincial association for working women and girls. The first discussions on organising women took place in 1909, preparatory to the first women's conference. Contributions to the discussion made

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65. Ibid.



it clear that the links holding these different women's groups together were loose.<sup>66</sup> Every local group had a completely free hand. Most women felt that the time had come to change this; the question only was, how and to what extent. Some women proposed the formation of a Central Provincial association for women and girls, based in Prague. Every National Socialist woman would be a member, and if there were more than ten members in any one place they would be able to form a branch. The whole thing would be administered by a committee. Others, however, were in favour of a much looser structure, whereby women could set up "free organisations" wherever they wanted.<sup>67</sup> These could elect agitation committees, and the structure would be supervised by an executive committee elected at a women's conference.<sup>68</sup> What is interesting about both suggestions is that neither provided for any links between the women's organisations and the rest of the party. Opinions in the debate that followed seemed to have been fairly equally divided, but eventually the system of "free organisations" was decided upon.<sup>69</sup>

It was 1911 before the issue was discussed at a party conference. A small group of women attended the sixth conference specifically in order to fight for women's rights within the party. They demanded complete autonomy within the party, and that the executive committee should work out a programme relating to women.<sup>70</sup>

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66. Ženské snahy, (1909), 1.

67. These "free organisations" would of course fall outside the scope of the law of association.

68. Ženské snahy, (1909), 12.

69. Padesát let života a třicet pět let práce Frani Zeminové, pp. 9-44.

70. Ženské snahy, (1911), 1.

These demands were repeated at a women's conference in September of the same year.<sup>71</sup> Organisational statutes for women, prepared by a party committee, were published shortly after the party conference. It appears that there had been little discussion of the statutes between the women's organisation and the party executive, and the participants in the women's conference seem to have rejected the basic idea behind them. They wanted independence, and this was exactly what the new statutes did not provide for. A representative of the executive committee at the women's conference defended himself by saying that independence was unimportant compared with working to solve the woman question, and foresaw time-wasting quarrels if independence were granted. The women, however, were not convinced. They argued that fears of indiscipline were groundless; as for independence - if Czech women wanted to be independent, they had to start somewhere.<sup>72</sup> The statute was then revised, with two women delegates helping the executive committee in their work. The new version linked membership of the women's sections very closely to membership of the party. Previously the two had never had to be synonymous.<sup>73</sup> Now, however, everything to do with the women's organisation was to be dealt with at an ordinary party congress rather than a special women's conference. The scope of activity allowed to all the women's

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71. Ibid., (1911), 18.

72. Ibid.

73. Before a woman could join a women's section she now had to be a member of a local organisation, which had to approve her membership of the women's section. The local organisation had to be represented on the committee of the women's section, and women had proportional representation on the committee of the local organisation. (Ženské snahy, (1911), 21.)

organisations was defined, which was also unpopular with women members.<sup>74</sup> The statute was amended slightly in 1913 to allow the women's executive to call a conference itself.<sup>75</sup> Thus National Socialist women, although their demands were greater, ended up with even less autonomy than their Social Democratic sisters.

Contrary to what one might expect from this trend, they became more rather than less open to the feminist movement. Partly, of course, this reflected the opportunism of National Socialist politics: after 1906 the Social Democrats' abandonment of woman suffrage left the field wide open for their exploitation, and they gradually managed to transform the public image of their women's organisation from that of a group of dedicated proletarians who shunned the middle classes to that of a group of working-class feminists, aware of the benefits which co-operation with a group of middle-class feminists could bring. At the beginning of the campaign to win the Diet suffrage for women and elect a woman to it (1908) their attitude was very similar to the Social Democrats'; the woman's candidature was insignificant compared to the reality of everyday party politics. National Socialist women, they argued, should not involve themselves in compromises with any other party or with middle class women, whose interests were antagonistic to their own.<sup>76</sup>

When the campaign was renewed in 1909 their position was confused. They supported the feminist candidate, Tůmová, but only

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74. Ibid.

75. Ženské snahy, (1913), 20.

76. Ženské snahy, (1908), 2.



on condition that she join their party, although they did not make this clear until the end, preferring to pose as supporters of feminist effort. When, however, the other parties put up candidates against her, they felt they could not run the risk of losing the seat and did the same.<sup>77</sup> By 1912, however, they had changed their line, and declared themselves ready to support any woman, even if she had no links with National Socialism:

"The candidature of a woman should be without political colouring: she should be simply a worker in the women's movement, who would defend it on principle."<sup>78</sup>

This change in attitude may reflect the comparative success of the suffrage movement. At the same time, the National Socialists were attempting to extend the scope of their influence within the middle-class women's movement by supporting the plan to introduce a formal Women's Suffrage Union.<sup>79</sup>

The women's organisation of the National Socialist party was not insignificant, either in terms of the party or of the women's movement, but it is extremely difficult to find out how big it actually was. Women were not mentioned separately in any membership figures till 1913, when it was estimated that there were 5,000 of them in 28 organisations.<sup>80</sup> Out of a total membership of 64,000 therefore, women formed less than ten per cent; not a very impressive achievement, but better than the Social

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77. Zenske snahy, (1909), 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11.

78. Zenske snahy, (1912), 10.

79. See Chapter

80. Protokol VII sjezdu čsl. strany národně sociální, 1-2 listopadu, 1913. (Prague, 1913). In comparison, the youth organisation was about 13,000 strong.

Democrats', if it can be believed. However, the number of women delegates at party congresses and the number of women in the Provincial Association for women and girls seem to cast a certain amount of doubt on this.<sup>81</sup>

If we try to examine the women's sections within the wider context of their respective parties and party policies we have to ask ourselves what kind of influence they had on the formulation of these policies and on the discussions which took place within the parties. It would appear that the lack of attention paid to the women's organisations was reflected in the lack of discussion of the women question in the party press and at conferences. The creation of women's sections and a women's press had had the effect of deflecting discussion on women from the main stream of the party. Once they had been established it became a rarity for an article on the subject to appear in any section of the party press. Within the Social Democratic party even its intellectual journal Akademie carried only one major article on women in its whole existence, and this discussed women's lesser enthusiasm for socialism, which it ascribed to their more emotional nature.<sup>82</sup> What discussion there was, at conferences and within Zensky list, centred on questions of organisation, recruitment and present tactics rather than future strategy. There was certainly no discussion of the woman question in terms of ideas, of trying to deepen any existing

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81. There were usually about three or four women there, as compared with about twenty at Social Democratic congresses. The Provincial Association had 98 members in 1908, 74 in 1910, and 87 in 1913. (SUA PP/V 1908-15. 25/107.)

82. F.V. Krejčí, "Žena a socialismus", Akademie, (1906-7), X.

understanding of women's position. The same is true of the National Socialists. - Ženské snahy was even more uniform and uninteresting than Ženský list, and any preoccupation with the theory of women's emancipation was minimal. National Socialist women probably had as little real influence on the direction of party policy as the Social Democrats. Although the links which they were allowed to cultivate with the middle class feminists made them appear to be more successful in this respect, these were in fact only a reflection of the change in orientation of National Socialist policy to encompass all who might be favourable to it.

One of the reasons why the Social Democratic women's organisation rarely fell foul of the party was because it was not controversial. Women complained about men's attitudes, their own lack of representation, but they posed no serious challenge to established ideas within the party. Only once during this period were new ideas voiced within the party, in a short-lived debate about "free motherhood". There was a tradition of criticism of the family and current social and sexual mores on the fringes of the Czech left, among anarchist intellectuals, many of whom later became anarcho-communists or socialists. Such a way of thinking was, however, entirely alien to the Social Democrats, who were often accused by their enemies of being in favour of free love - women's emancipation and sexual permissiveness being sometimes synonymous in the popular imagination - and took pains to disprove this. However, the two traditions joined forces briefly for a while in 1913 when some articles on free motherhood were published in Ženský list.



Ideas about free love were current among one section of the Czech anarchist movement, mainly the intellectuals, who had little in common with the working class anarchist movement in North Bohemia. They were voiced primarily in articles in anarchist journals, in translations of foreign pamphlets on the subject, occasional free unions and a short-lived commune.<sup>83</sup> They found some expression also in the cult of literary decadence which flourished at the turn of the century.<sup>84</sup> This provided an inspiration with its openness in talking about sex, but it adopted a very Nietzschean attitude, which the anarchists did not consciously imitate. Although these people supported free love and contraception, an escape from the bourgeois restrictions of marriage, the assumptions about women's role in society which lay behind their rhetoric were in fact very conservative. Their train of thought is probably best illustrated by the pronouncements of one of their major figures, Stanislav K. Neumann.

At the turn of the century Neumann's house in Prague was a centre for like-minded people. Neumann himself was editor, successively; of Nový kult, Anarchistická revue, Šibeníčky, and Záduha, and also contributed to many other anarchist and anarcho-communist periodicals. His articles on free love are interesting because they demonstrate

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83. One anarchist colony was set up near Prague in 1909. It consisted of 11 men, 5 women and 5 children. (V. Štěpan, Ceský anarchismus 1890-1914. Thesis, Ústav pro české literatury (Prague, 1968) pp. 193-205.) Neumann translated "Free Love" by Charles Albert, and compiled a pamphlet "O prozřetelném plození dětí", from the works of P. Robin.
84. For example, the works of Karásek or a popular, less 'arty' writer like Emanuel z Lešehradů both paint women as dangerous, devouring creatures to be avoided.

the one-sided approach which most anarchists took to the family. Neumann had been involved with the Progressive movement and had obviously absorbed some of their maxims. He later boasted that he had been the "friend of the first emancipated Czech girls",<sup>85</sup> and he acknowledged that the current position of women presented a problem which had to be solved. Further than this, however, the lessons of the Progressive movement seem to have been lost on him and he saw the liberation of women purely in terms of sexual stereotypes.<sup>86</sup> He thought that the central problem of women's emancipation was their fertility; their inability to control it and their fear of having children kept them enslaved. The answer to the problem, he thought, lay in contraception, which would also enable the working class as a whole to have more control over their own lives. Women additionally needed economic independence, so that they would not be forced into marriage purely because they needed economic support.<sup>87</sup> But Neumann never questioned the need for marriage-type relationships in which women would have children, nor the balance of power which would exist within them.

If, thanks to efficient contraception, women no longer had to fear motherhood, Neumann was confident that they would not reject it; on the contrary, for it was their natural calling. He had no

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85. St. K. Neumann, "Politická epizoda", in: Vzpomínky (Sebrané spisy, Prague, 1948), X, p. 20.

86. His own marriage was fairly typical in this respect; despite his commitment to women's emancipation he left his wife to care for the house and children, and then left her in 1904, to the disapproval of much of the Czech left. (K. Resler, "Kamila Neumannová", Marginalie, 1944-6).

87. St. K. Neumann, "Nová žena", (1903), in: Statí a projevy, I, (Sebrané spisy Prague, 1966), III, pp. 29-30.

patience with contemporary women's emancipation movements which, he thought, sought to make women like men, depriving them of their femininity, which was the only centre of their lives. There was an immutable difference between the male and the female temperament, he thought, and only women who acknowledged this could hope to be free:

"The sense of a man's existence is in relation to the work which he has taken up; the sense of a woman's existence is in relation to the man whom she has chosen."<sup>88</sup>

and further:

"Man is strength, woman is warmth, man gives to his work, woman prepares delight; man constructs, woman beautifies."<sup>89</sup>

In his discussions of women's emancipation Neumann never mentioned education. One concludes from his writings that he thought there was no need to educate women because they should, ideally, devote themselves to motherhood:

"The function of lover and mother, if it is to be filled entirely and in a civilised way is so great and valuable that it suffices for the satisfactory fulfilment of life, especially where the woman is also running a household."<sup>90</sup>

The assumptions about women's nature which lay behind his ideas were not very different from those which underlay some Social Democratic official thinking. They were hardly sympathetic to women's aspirations for equality. Women who had been involved in the early stages of the anarchist movement later exposed its

88. St. K. Neumann, "Mateřství a osvobození ženy" (1907), in: Statí a projevy, II, (Sebrané spisy, Prague, 1966), IV, pp. 459-67.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.



double standard on the woman question. Marie Majerová, in her novel Náměstí republiky (1914), presented these doctrines as a convenient justification of the exploitation of women, who were left without even the security which conventional marriage provided. But those who rejected the practice of these anarchists did not necessarily reject the basic idea behind it, and any criticism of the family at least provided a foundation on which later propagandists could build. In addition, the subject was a topic of discussion among feminists and socialist women everywhere. It surfaced in the Czech Social Democratic party in 1913, with some articles on "free motherhood" written by Luisa Landová Štychová.

Landová Štychová was an anarcho-communist and not a Social Democrat, but she was close enough to Social Democracy to get her articles printed in Ženský list. They were, in any case, prompted by a debate which was currently taking place with German Social Democracy about the issue of the "birth strike". Some people in the party had argued that if women stopped having children they would bring about the end of capitalism, because it would no longer be provided with workers and soldiers. This view attracted a lot of support, but the left of the party and many leading members of the socialist women's movement disagreed strongly. Klara Zetkin and Luise Zietz opposed it for two different reasons. On the one hand, as Zietz argued, this would make a public affair of a private decision; the number of children a woman had was entirely up to her. Zetkin, on the other hand, opposed family planning, arguing that the workers would win by force of numbers, not by quality.<sup>91</sup>

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91. Richard J. Evans, Sozialdemokratie und Frauenemancipation im deutschen Kaiserreich, (Berlin, 1979), pp. 247-9.

Štychová took issue with these arguments in a series of articles in September and October 1913.<sup>92</sup> She maintained that both Zetkin and Zietz underestimated the importance of family planning in the cultural development of the proletariat. They thought that it was a private affair, while maintaining that the development of a person's private life should be subordinated to the social good - and, by implication, birth control would not contribute to the social good. Štychová argued that the social good was an idealistic concept; it would be a mistake to assume that, as determined by a future society, it would oppress women any less than it did now.

Štychová thought that motherhood should be recognised, rather than idealised. Society should take responsibility for mothers, rather than simply let them get on with it in appalling conditions. Anyone who opposed birth control with the argument that it would reduce the number of workers left to fight capital was just ignorant of the conditions in which the working class lived - people who were hungry and beset by material worries were in no state to make a revolution.

While she contended that society should take more responsibility for children, Štychová still maintained that it was finally woman's choice to have a child or not. Her choice would inevitably be dictated by numerous personal and social considerations. A mother had a responsibility to herself and the child not to risk its life or her own or to exhaust herself by unwanted pregnancies. But

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92. "Volné máteřství" (Free motherhood). Ženský list, (1913), 39, 40, 41, 42. "K diskusi o omezení porodů" (Towards the discussion on limiting births). Ženský list, (1913), 46.



society equally was responsible for providing the conditions in which she would be able to control the number of children she had.

While early Social Democratic theorists of the women's movement such as Bebel generally assumed that, given the right conditions women's maternal instincts would encourage them to have many children, Štychová argued for small families in the interests of human progress, and was never very enthusiastic about the mystery of motherhood.

Predictably, however, her views were not echoed by the Czech Social Democratic leadership. An article on the women's page of Právo lidu in November 1913 took up the issue of childbearing from a different angle. The writer pointed out that many women entered into motherhood without any preparation and with not idea of what it entailed. The answer, however, was not to limit pregnancies but to make motherhood easier; after all:

"Useful motherhood is a kind of culmination of the female intelligence, a voluntary subjection to the laws of nature and society."

The question of contraception was not one which women should resolve alone; men - society - should also be involved. In any case, contraception was not really the answer; surely the reason women did not use it was because they didn't want to. Instead, girls should marry later, and there should be more preparation for and support of motherhood.<sup>93</sup>

After this statement Štychová published no more on the subject of free motherhood in Ženský list. The next article it printed which

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93. Právo lidu, 16th November, 1913.



discussed contraception expressed the correct point of view. Fewer children, it said, did not raise the working class standard of living but merely diminished the number of proletarians left to fight capitalism. Large families were not the chief cause of poverty, and childbearing did not harm women as much as bad living conditions and unsuitable work.<sup>94</sup> No more was written on free love in the pages of Ženský list thereafter.

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94. Ženský list (1914), 9.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT: 1897-1914

#### Feminist organisation

Within the development of the feminist movement there are several distinct strands. One is purely 'feminist' organisation - for women only, on issues which were primarily of interest to them, and attempts to give this some kind of internal coherence and centralisation. Another is the organisation of women within political parties: not all parties had the same attitude towards women participating in politics and women's rights, and even when their attitudes were similar, their practices were usually different. Thus one finds a number of parties with different aspirations and different expectations of women's organisations. And finally, a prerequisite of debate, the expression of different views and publicity was the existence of a feminist journal press. This, too, started to emerge in the mid 1890's.

At the beginning of the 1890's - just at the time when the progressive student movement was beginning and the Young Czechs were about to reach the zenith of their power - little consciousness of political change could be felt among the ranks of middle class women. Women's patriotic and charitable activity in the 1860's and 1870's had left its legacy in a number of societies devoted to these ends. A survey undertaken in 1891 showed that there were 145 such societies in all. The average membership was around 150. All the societies were either charitable or devoted to an appropriate nationalist activity, like singing or gymnastics. There was not a single

educational society or group among them, though they probably organised the occasional lecture.<sup>1</sup>

On the initiative of one of these patriotic societies the first Czech women's conference was called in 1897. It was the first conference which really started the women's movement in Bohemia; it provided the impulse to found societies and start journals. Looking at it, however, one is struck by the limited horizons of most of the participants. It touched on none of the subjects which would, even 10 years later, have been regarded as essential for a proper understanding of the women's movement. Politics and political parties it ignored completely, even though this was precisely the time when the "woman question" was beginning to be discussed in parties. Even girls' secondary and higher education, the battle for which was just being fought, received practically no attention. The conference reflected the past, rather than the future, of the women's movement. The feelings about women's position and expectations to which it gave expression died hard, but their influence and supporters diminished from 1897.

The Národní jednota pošumavská, which first mooted the idea of having a conference (it should be noted that the initiative did not come from women independently), was one of two nationalist cultural associations, designed to protect Czech interests in "mixed" lands. It had been founded in 1885, and aimed to protect Czechs materially,

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1. There were about 4,500-5,000 women altogether in these societies, although one - the Women's Czech Industrial Society - had 2,500 members. Statistický přehled ženských spolkův, odborův a komitetů československých (Prague, Ženský výrobní spolek český, 1891).



and through educational and charitable activity. There were 180 branches of one or other of these organisations in Bohemia, and 70 women's sections.<sup>2</sup> The conference, as originally envisaged by the národní jednota pošumavská, would hopefully "awaken national consciousness and increase national activity among the larger half of the nation."<sup>3</sup> It was, therefore, entirely conceived in terms of patriotic feminism, what women could do for the nation. Soon, however, it became clear that the project was too ambitious for the Jednota to undertake. It was left to a large committee of women members to organise independently.

The main task was first to settle on a programme. The one adopted was a synthesis of the two put forward. It had eight sections:

1. A short history of the activity of Czech women from the days of the national awakening.
2. Women's activity in the family.
3. Women's responsibility to the nation and the extension of their patriotic activity.
4. Women's responsibility to society, or charitable work.
5. The elevation of morality.
6. Women's rights.
7. The desires and aims of individual classes of women active outside their own family.
8. Means towards raising women's education and the realisation of women's desires.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Zpráva o prvním sjezdu žen českoslovanských ve dnech 15 a 16 května 1897 na radnici král. hlav města Prahy (n.d.), p. 11.

3. Ibid., p. 1.

4. Ibid., p. 2.

Having decided on the subjects they wished to discuss, the committee sent the programme round to women's societies in Bohemia and Moravia, asking if any of their members would be interested in speaking on any of the points. This made little allowance for any personal knowledge or experience which women might have, while leaving the floor open for lengthy speeches on well-worn nationalist themes. The response to the demand for speakers provided a programme which was not even as varied as it might have been. There were four speakers on "women's responsibility to the nation" but only one on women's rights.

On 15th May 1897 the conference opened with a gala performance in the National Theatre, recitations of poems specially written for the occasion and suitable tableaux. The honorary president of the conference, Venceslava Lužická Srbová,<sup>5</sup> got the proceedings off to a good start by urging women first to remember their responsibilities to their nation, for only then could they ask for rights.

Most of the women at the conference said very little which leads one to think that they were opposed to this. They subscribed to the usual idealised picture of the past of Czech women: references to Prague as the "town of Libuše" were frequent, and this quotation, from the history of Czech women is not untypical. Women, the speaker said:

"ran their households in towns, on estates, in cottages,... baked bread, dried fruit, boiled soap... and became well known as wonderful cooks, clean, economical housewives, and conscientious workers."<sup>6</sup>

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5. Lužická Srbová was a minor writer, editor of a sentimental women's magazine, Lada.
  6. Zpráva o prvním sjezdu... p. 30.



They spared nothing to make sure that their sons were educated, and brought up their daughters to be religious and know the old national songs. These women may have been "only housewives", but they brought to these tasks an (albeit unconscious) sense of national purpose. It was precisely this sense of purpose and national awareness which the women at the conference wanted to bring back into the lives of women as a whole.

National purpose for women was really expressed in two ways, through the family, and through her responsibility to other members of the nation less privileged than herself.

The most important aspect of national purpose in the family was the upbringing of children. Nearly all speakers found time to touch on this topic and to emphasise the importance of bringing up children to speak Czech.

"A further responsibility, your most sacred responsibility, Czech mothers, is to bring up a race which loves its country and its people... The whole nation is agreed in demanding this of you... Bring up your children in a Czech way!"<sup>7</sup>

The stress laid on this seemingly obvious article of faith led one observer to comment,

"I, at least, was almost embarrassed when one of the speakers said with emphasis, as if it was something less than obvious, that a Czech women should bring up her children in a Czech way. How else should she bring them up?"

What had men been doing to educate women if women had only just come to recognise this?<sup>8</sup>

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7. Ibid., p. 24.

8. Samostatnost, (1897), I, numbers 8 and 9.



A woman could also support the nation from within her position in the family, by buying Czech goods. She would thus support Czech firms and keep them from being outdone by their German - and especially Jewish - competitors. (This anti-Semitic strain is worth noting because it was quite widespread at the conference. Large-scale capitalists, who exploited Czech workers and forced Czech firms out of business, were always portrayed as Jewish).

Women's national responsibility to the people lay not so much in charitable work, (that was their social responsibility, being members of the middle classes), but in education,

"It is also the... sacred responsibility of those who have the requisite qualities, and whose education is sufficient, to give lectures in their neighbourhood for all classes. ... I have particularly the working woman in mind... For the working woman always remains a wife and mother, and all the inviting slogans which sound in her ears do not confuse her so easily. Only offer her a really friendly hand, open your heart to her, and she will respond willingly."<sup>9</sup>

The largest amount of time at the conference was occupied by these discussions of female and family patriotism and by the far simpler question of women and the family in general. Many speakers found it necessary to elaborate in detail their concept of the ideal marriage and the ideal woman. They felt that, since so many women fell so far short of this ideal, it was a necessary step for womankind in general to try to achieve this. At the moment, women seemed to look down on motherhood and housewifery, but,

"The aim for which a woman gets married is no less sacred than any profession. It is family good and domestic happiness... In the domestic sphere, a hard-working and educated woman is a better flower in the garden of humanity."<sup>10</sup>

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9. Zpráva o prvním sjezdu... p. 30.

10. Ibid., p. 21.

This attack on the mass of unenlightened, uneducated women - (it was, by implication, the same ones who brought their children up to speak German as couldn't boil an egg) - is something that we have met before in the earliest products of patriotic feminist literature. It was basically a conviction that women could only begin to ask for rights once they had fulfilled their "natural duties" as wife, mother, and patriot.

"The family good further depends on a wife who is true to her responsibilities to her husband and family... However, a sensible husband will not prevent her from participating in public life... if he can see that she is faithfully performing her duties."<sup>11</sup>

In this situation the nature of marriage, the power which men wielded over women in it, was not discussed, let alone questioned. Men and women were fighting the national fight together; the more aware they both were of their separate responsibilities, the better.

Education for girls was discussed at great length: not, however, secondary and higher education, but a sort of preparatory training for marriage and motherhood. Two separate speakers talked on this subject, and suggested extending the current provisions for girls' education to include something like this. The girls would learn to cook, sew, wash, plus the "theoretical" aspects of housekeeping, and would emerge "like a proper housewife". This type of education was deemed essential even for girls who in the future would devote themselves to something more interesting, for, "Only a woman who has not made herself a stranger to her real calling is a whole woman."<sup>12</sup>

Only two speeches at the whole conference sounded what might be called a dissenting note, and even then the degree of dissent was small.

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11. Ibid., p. 21.

12. Ibid., p. 19.



The writer Teréza Nováková spoke on "the free choice of profession according to talent and ability and free access to all kinds of education." She argued that modern women no longer looked to marriage as the only way out; therefore, it was wrong to prepare girls only for marriage.

"There are many talented girls who do housework only from a sense of responsibility, with the firm conviction that they are wasting valuable time."<sup>13</sup>

She criticised the way in which girls and boys were brought up differently. A previous speaker had said:

"As concerns boys, I think that a mother cannot do more to bring them up than I have already mentioned (i.e. a Czech upbringing). The father and the school have much more influence here, because the education of young men after a certain age goes beyond a mother's influence."<sup>14</sup>

Nováková, however, saw this in rather a different light:

"Even the poorest parents, if they have a boy whose talent is attested at primary school prepare him for further study, and society approves of this and supports him. Why cannot the highly gifted daughter of a workman, craftsman or peasant devote herself to study at the expense of a society to which she will one day certainly be of use?"<sup>15</sup>

Therefore it was the parents' duty to see that their daughters received the kind of education they deserves: it was the daughters' duty to stand up for their rights and not be talked into doing anything they did not want to do.

The only other speech which could be called remotely 'feminist' was made by Zofie Tůmová on women's suffrage.<sup>16</sup> She examined existing

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13. Ibid., p. 56.

14. Ibid., p. 25.

15. Ibid., p. 56.

16. She was the wife of Karel Tůma, editor of Národní listy, and the mother of Marie Tůmová, later a leader of the women's suffrage campaign.



women's rights in detail, (the first person to do so) and pointed out that, from the 1870's they had gradually been eroded, due to male prejudice. She demanded the vote for women on equal terms with men with no system of proxy voting, and the abolition of paragraph 30 of the law of association, whereby women were forbidden to join or form political societies.

The other section of the conference was that devoted to reports from individual classes of women workers. Those represented were teachers, post, telegraph and telephone workers, women traders and shop assistants, farmers' wives, servants and factory workers. The first two groups merely put forward at the conference demands which they had been discussing among themselves. The reports from the servants and factory workers were intended to give an example of what working-class life was like. The committee had first asked Karla Máchová (the Social Democrat) to participate in the preparatory discussions and to prepare a report on working women. She had suggested that she deliver a lecture on prostitution: when the ladies on the committee wanted to censor it, she refused, and left.<sup>17</sup> To replace her they had two speakers, both very clerical and very conservative. The servant emphasised servants' responsibilities; they asked only for a little time off to go to church on Sundays. The factory worker asked that men should earn a family wage so that women should not have to work. She described the conditions of sweated labour under which most women worked, and which, she said, were caused by Jewish entrepreneurs. These revelations apparently brought tears to the eyes of the audience. However, they were only a

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17. Samostatnost, (1897), I, 8 and 9.

small part of the conference, most of which - apart from asides about how to treat servants - had excluded working women completely. Most of the criticism of the conference was focussed on this point.

Samostatnost, the paper of the newly-formed Radical Progressive Party, pointed out that the self-conscious patriotism apparent at the conference had never extended as far as working women.

"Because of its explicitly patriotic (vlastenecký) standpoint, the Czech women's conference did not illuminate the responsibilities of Czech women to the nation thoroughly, impartially and from all sides, because it did not demonstrate sufficiently what the nation is, and what it means for each of its members."

Until Czech women began to include working women and servants as part of the nation and treat them as equals in society, things could not improve.<sup>18</sup>

The lack of attention paid to and understanding of prostitution was also widely criticised. The view which had been implied in many reports was that prostitution was the fault of the prostitute and could have been avoided if only she had not read so many novels.

Prostitution and the double standard in sexual morality were just beginning to be widely discussed at that time. Ignoring the issue simply lent further weight to criticism that the women's movement was out of touch. Naše doba, the Realist journal edited by Masaryk, described the women at the conference as,

"women to whom the woman question is not an idea but a slogan which floats on the surface of the age and which they have taken hold of as something temporary. It is not enough merely to announce yourself as a friend of women's emancipation, you must really free yourself continually from the hundreds of ideas which embody the current relationship of men to women and vice versa."<sup>19</sup>

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18. Ibid.

19. Naše doba, (1896-7), IV, p. 426.



Rozhledy, another journal associated with the progressive movement, was similarly critical of the women's self-image.

"The ladies emphasise the fact that as well as a social aspect, their conference should have a patriotic one... This is a waste of time which would be better used for the ladies to try and become conscious of what the woman question actually is, where and how - in our circumstances - they ought to start."<sup>20</sup>

The debates about the first conference really drew the lines of many future debates about aim, purpose and organisation within the women's movement. The place of the male left-wing critics of middle-class patriotic feminism was gradually taken by women, especially those for whom the domestic ideals pictured by many speakers were unattainable or irrelevant. These differences began to come into the open, as a distinct division within the women's movement, several years later when the feminist Czech Women's Club was finally established.

One of the most important results of the conference was the organisational impetus which it gave to the women's movement. From it emerged the first women's society to address itself to a range of subjects, to attempt to draw together the few threads that then existed into a more effective whole. Before the conference began it had been decided that an attempt should be made to set up some kind of women's society when it ended: already, under the influence of all this activity a new women's journal had started to appear.<sup>21</sup> The society which was formed, the Ústřední Spolek českých žen (Central Czech Women's Society) consisted mainly of women who had been on the

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20. Rozhledy, (1897), VI, p. 382.

21. Ženský svět, edited by Tereza Nováková.



organising committee, and was clearly influenced by suggestions put forward at the conference as to what it should do. One idea had been that it should act as a general exchange and co-ordinator of charitable activity, thus helping those women who were charitably inclined to be more effective; the whole orientation of the society, as of the conference, was towards charitable patriotic activity.

The Central Society was composed of sections, each one dealing with a separate aspect of what the founders considered to be women's necessary preoccupations. They all arranged lectures and submitted petitions; some cast their net fairly wide, others concentrated on one or two issues. At the beginning there were four sections; health, education, charitable, and national economic. The health section organised a popular hygiene course for women and later concentrated on nursing, trying to professionalise it by holding competitions and training a few selected nurses.

The charitable section similarly concentrated on one thing, the Prague foundling hospital. Women at the first conference had listened to a report on the conditions there and had decided that something should be done about them; the charitable section concerned itself with doing good works for the women who were there and attempting to supervise the foster parents to whom the children were farmed out an early age. The insights they thus obtained into the lives of a large number of the very poorest women in Prague and its environs did not, however, moderate their patronising attitude. In 1902 they decided to ask that single mothers should get support for only one child from the hospital, "so that irregular unions should not be

encouraged",<sup>22</sup> and it seems that their policy was still the same some years later.

The educational section was much more diverse in its activities. In addition to submitting petitions asking for women to be admitted to higher education at the beginning of its existence it also ran a series of lectures every winter with a slight (though not pronounced) orientation towards the woman question. After 1907 it was mainly preoccupied with its efforts to set up a girls' lyceum in Prague. The section seems to have died out in 1910.

The very existence of a national-economic section reflects the concern with women's economic power within the family which was expressed so often at the first conference. Initially it concentrated on what it termed 'domestic industry' - in theory, the preservation of the cottage crafts performed by women but in practice usually the production of tablecloths embroidered in peasant designs by patriotic women's groups. Later it turned its attention to the "svůj k svému" ("each to his own") campaign; an attempt to persuade Czech women, as the purchasers of most family needs, to buy at Czech shops rather than German or Jewish ones. It does not seem ever to have considered the actual economic position of the large number of Czech women who had to work for their living and what it could do to help them.

After 1908 more sections were established, which seemed to show that the horizons of the Central Society were gradually broadening in line with the rest of the women's movement. The first

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22. Ústřední spolek českých žen, výroční zpráva, 1902.



of these was the law and social section (1908). Its main aim was declared to be the protection of women and children, and in 1909 it began to give free legal advice to women (The Czech Women's Club by then also had a legal advice service). Then in 1910 a 'young generation' section was set up, intended to encourage new members, especially working class girls. 1910 and 1912 saw the establishment of anti-prostitution and abstinence (temperance) sections.<sup>23</sup>

Although the range of interest covered was fairly wide, the achievements of the Central Society were negligible. Indeed, none of the sections seems to have had a clear aim towards which it could strive and which it was also possible to achieve. In most cases they were content to submit endless petitions as their chosen way of bringing anything to official notice. The solution to most of the issues they took up, which were all clearly of a charitable nature, or depended on the approval of Prague city council. Although they managed to secure the appointment of two of their members to the social commission of the council, this seems to have had little effect on the realisation of their plans. The petitions they submitted were bewildering in their variety. Because there were so many of them the society was unable to campaign effectively on any of the issues involved. To detail a very small number of the petitions they submitted in 1914, they included:- free milk for mothers, unmarried mothers to

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23. In its annual reports the Ústřední spolek published membership figures until 1906.

1900	428 members
1901	534
1902 c.	600
1904 c.	500
1906	608



receive the same war benefit as married ones, against pornography, supporting an insurance scheme to cover girls who were jilted, and asking that children who travelled to school by train to be put in separate compartments so that they did not meet unpleasant people.<sup>24</sup>

The Central Society suffered partly from the breadth of its field of activity: it could not hope to carry on six or seven campaigns simultaneously. If it had limited itself to charitable activity, where there was no other society trying to perform a similar co-ordinating role, it might have been more effective. In 1910 Naše doba referred to its potential in this field with approval:

"Nowadays one can say even more definitely that the Central Czech Women's Society, with its social tendency, is giving rise to the possibility that there may emerge from it an influential, substantial and progressive social agency. This will then move with the spirit of the times, and assist the development of social activity; it will not adhere to the traditions of charity."<sup>25</sup>

But even supposing that it was possible for the Central Society to transform itself into a kind of social work bureau, to abandon the patriotic sides of its activity, social work was an essentially 'feminine' activity, something which was still far from being a profession. People could attempt to justify it by saying that it came close to professionalism in its approach, but it was still not an organisation which had any special links even with the limited number of professional women who then existed. So while it could cater for the definite group of women who were interested in this type of activity because they saw it as a woman's role its function was always limited.

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24. Ústřední spolek českých žen, výroční zpráva, 1914.

25. Naše doba, (1909-10), XVII, number 4.

The idea that the Central Society should become a professional expert body must also reflect its increasing isolation from the rest of the women's movement. Charity and patronage, still important ingredients of its success, were less appealing to the new feminists who had emerged since 1897 and who associated themselves much more readily with its sister organisation, the Czech Women's Club. The development of a new type of feminism, more socially conscious than the old was a feature common to many feminist movements. The preponderance of respectable middle class married women who either struggled to help only themselves or dispensed charity to those less fortunate was displaced by a growing number of single professional women who understood feminism as meaning, among other things, a profound social change. They wanted the organisations to which they belonged to effect this change, not merely to ask those in power if something could be done.

The organisation in which these views and the opposition to the Central Society found most expression was the Czech Women's Club (Ženský klub český). It was in fact an offshoot of the Central Society, though it quickly gained independence. The idea of a club had originally been suggested at the 1897 conference,<sup>26</sup> but it stagnated for several years until an effort was made to get it started in 1901; the fact that Prague German women were about to acquire something similar provided the necessary impetus. The founding meeting of the club was held in December 1902. By January 1904 premises had been acquired and the club was actually opened, and by March 1905 it had 420 members.<sup>27</sup> Membership seems to have remained fairly

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26. Zpráva o prvním sjezdu... pp. 90-97.

27. Ženský svět, (1905), IX, 12th March.



constant; it was still around the 400 mark in 1911.<sup>28</sup> The aims of the club were described as,

"the setting up of a reading room, a library, the arrangement of lectures, and the concentration of women of all classes for acquaintance, for self-improvement, and for refreshment. The Club should perform the necessary function of a centre of struggles for feminist ideas, and should also be a refuge, where peace and quiet welcome women into the midst of their sisters."<sup>29</sup>

Among the women who were elected to the first committee were Fraňa Zeminová (the National Socialist), Karla Máchová (the Social Democrat), Františka Plamínková (later to become the leader of the suffrage movement), Anna Honzáková (the first home-grown woman doctor) and Charlotte Masaryková.<sup>30</sup> The opening was attended by women's societies of all kinds, from trade unions to academic groups and charitable ladies' organisations.<sup>31</sup> These facts by themselves demonstrate that the Club was rather different from the Central Society.

The statutes of the new club corresponded to the declaration of intent just quoted. There was, however, another section which said that all members must be of Czech or Slav nationality. Women could not join automatically, they had to be proposed by two existing members and their application submitted to a committee. These regulations led later on to accusations of anti-Semitism, that Jewish women were being rejected on the pretext that, even if they spoke Czech, they were not of Czech nationality.<sup>32</sup> The subscription

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28. SÚA.PP/V.1908-13. 27/23.

29. Ženský svět, (1903), VII, number 13.

30. Ibid., (1904), VIII, 3rd January.

31. SÚA.PP/V 1900-7 27/23..

32. LA PNP. Alice Masaryková, notebooks relating to Ženský kroužek Slavia, December 1903.



was 10k p.a. It was not until 1913 that a lower rate of subscription (2k) was introduced; until then, membership must have been out of the reach of many individual women.<sup>33</sup> Organisations could, however, join as organisations, and their members were then entitled to use the facilities. The club also let out rooms for meetings, and so, whatever their political allegiance and whatever kind of group they belonged to, most women could be sure of coming into contact with the club at some point.

In its first report the Club was proud to announce that many women's clubs, (and some men's) had joined it. It arranged language courses, sport, evening entertainments and special lectures for girls. Most important, it arranged debates and lectures about women at least every fortnight. Members were frequently sent out to lecture in different parts of the country. In the tradition long established by the Central Society they organised various 'actions' (campaigns) - for women school doctors, for women teachers to be appointed to headships, supporting women post office workers in their demand for equal pay. And of course they also participated in the women's suffrage campaign.

By 1906 the number of courses organised had grown enormously. The main concern at this time was for votes for women; the Women's Suffrage Committee, formed to fight for this in 1905, was a part of the Club until 1908. It also found time, however, to organise a campaign against the clerical girls' gymnasium at Vinohrady. Sections started to develop inside the club. By 1908 there were 5,

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33. Ženský klub český, výroční zpráva, 1913.

"working" (day to day organisation) to which Charlotte Masarykova and Karla Machova belonged, social, economic, art, and abstinence. The outside lecturing came to a peak at this time (one of the high spots of the suffrage campaign.<sup>34</sup> The lectures which the club organised in Prague were predominantly about women, women in history, in politics and in philosophy, though there were also lectures on literature and on "social problems" like alcoholism. More general political problems - for example, the problems of Czech self-government or the Balkan question, came up with increasing frequency towards the end of the period. Questions affecting women were dealt with in "feminist evenings", which were held from 1912. In 1913 they held a campaign for the reform of women's clothing. Two exhibitions of the proposed designs were held, and eventually a few were selected for women to adopt.<sup>35</sup>

The facilities and services which the club provided were extensive. Apart from the library and reading room there was a restaurant, and guest rooms for women who were staying in Prague for a few days. There was a free legal advice service and an employment bureau.

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34. Ibid.

35. Ženský klub český, výroční zpráva, 1913. The object of clothing reform was to make women's clothes more comfortable and healthy and, in the Czech case, to give them a national appearance, so that Czech women did not have to be dependent on the dictates of Paris fashion. Quite a lot of feminists seem to have adopted it, though ridicule from men usually cowed them into abandoning it. Františka Plamínková was one who went on wearing it until the end of the war, despite the experience of being mistaken for a spy on account of it just after the war broke out. (Juliana Lancová, "Několik pohledů zpět", in Kniha života, osobnost a práce F. Plamínkové, (Prague, 1935), p. 223.)



It might seem paradoxical that what was essentially an umbrella organisation, providing a wide range of facilities for the movement as a whole should come to represent the "new" type of feminism while the Central Society represented the "old". But in fact the very organisation of a club did in some way provide more for women for whom feminism was more a way of life than an occasional activity. Women who needed and made use of the facilities a club could provide - a restaurant, or a reading room - were more likely to be single than married. Similarly, single women were more likely to have the time to run such activities and services. The loose organisation of the club made room for a new interpretation of feminism. This was based not so much on women's patriotic duty to the nation, discharging the responsibilities which devolved upon her because of her class and her sex, but rather on the idea that all women, regardless of class, had something in common, and that the way to bring this out was to organise together as women. It was this type of consciousness which distinguished the Club from the Central Society. The differences between them were manifested in a number of disputes. We have already come across the argument over Minerva, where disparaging comments on the respective characteristics of the Club and the Central Society formed an important component of the accusations which flew between the two sides. The assumption by women from the Club of the direction of Minerva had impelled the Central Society to comment that this was a typical tactic: to assume that they knew best without ever having put in any real work in the cause involved.<sup>36</sup> Much the same sort of argument also took place over the second Czech women's

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36. See Chapter 3.



conference, except that now the argument centred round interpretations of the nature of the women's movement, rather than just the place of education within it.

The Central Society, considering itself the legitimate descendant of the first conference, and thus entitled to organise another, decided that this should be held in May 1908. It circulated invitations to women's groups to send delegates to the committee and agreed on a programme, in much the same way as the first conference had been organised. Eleven years had passed since the last conference, and no-one had yet felt the need to arrange another but the Central Society carried on regardless. They did not really take into account the fact that the women's movement had developed considerably in the past eleven years, that there were now many societies which were concerned with the problems to be discussed at the conference, and many more topics which were considered to be relevant to the woman question.

The programme was divided into sections, as it had been for the first conference. Speakers were again asked for according to the programme, this resulting in about fifty lectures being packed into the five days of the conference. The lectures were read to the assembled women and were briefly discussed only in the plenary session at the end of the conference. Those who had delivered lectures had generally made a few suggestions for action on the basis of what they had said, and these were all adopted. The resolutions thus made were diverse, ranging from the pan-Slav (that a union of Slav women in Austria should be established and that there should in general be more economic links with Slav countries) to the charitable (to set up

orphanages and shelters for abandoned children, and also societies for the physical and moral protection of young girls). There were also more conventionally feminist demands, such as those for maternity insurance, co-education or that women be allowed to become health or housing inspectors with local government. The conference supported the demands of all women workers, and at the same time asked that girls be given more training for motherhood. In addition there were resolutions asking for the abolition of the death penalty and for the encouragement of folk art.<sup>37</sup> Despite the fact that in April 1908 Marie Tůmová had first stood as women's candidate in Vysoke Myto there was no speaker on women's suffrage. In any case the variety of resolutions really precluded anything being done about them. This lack of programme and the general absence of discussion at the conference prompted a small group of women to get up and protest at the end. They included several well known members of the Women's Suffrage Committee, women in the Progressive party and National Socialist women.<sup>38</sup> (The Central Society had snubbed the Women's Suffrage Committee by not inviting it to participate in the preparations).<sup>39</sup> In their protest these women implied that the organisers of the conference had deliberately limited discussion

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37. Ženský svět, (1908), XII, September, 1908.

38. Forty women signed the protest printed in Ženský obzor, including Františka Plamínková, Marie Tůmová, Anna Schöntagová, Marie Štěpánková, and at least four other women who were active members of the Women's Suffrage Committee; Olga Stránská from the Progressive party; Božena Frintová and Anna Teysslerová from the National Socialist party; Zdenka Wiedermannová and Alice Masaryková.

39. The Central Society had not asked the Committee to contribute anything to the conference as an organisation and so it refused to contribute at all. (ANM PhDr Albina Honzáková. Výbor pro volební právo žen, protokoly: protocol of 26th March, 1908.)



in order to conceal the deep differences of opinion which in fact existed. The quarrel spilled over into the women's journal press and daily newspapers and continued for several months. It clearly raised issues which were seen as being of central importance to the women's movement.

Most criticisms were aimed at the Central Society itself. People argued that its very nature should have precluded it from calling a conference of this kind, and that the way it had arranged it showed how out of touch it was with contemporary feminism. It had approached its task as if nothing had changed since 1897, and as if a speech on a subject was all that was required to make women understand and act upon it. The consequent programme of speech upon speech, with no time for debate, diminished confidence in the conference from the very start, asserted its critics. Even if the speeches were delivered by women of different political persuasions the lack of debate meant that the view of the Central Society, expressed in the resolutions formulated at the end of each speech and accepted without discussion at the end of the conference could eventually prevail. And most 'progressive' women felt that the Central Society did not really represent them. Františka Plamínková,\* writing in Ženský obzor, said:

"It is necessary to be aware that 'the conference is organised by the Central Czech Women's Society' which, in the ten years of its existence has not proved that it is able to be a focus for the interests and work of all classes of women. During this time it has not justified its own title of 'central' with a real inner concentration of the forces of the Czech women's movement. Today we have absolutely no society which could be really 'central.'"<sup>40</sup>

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\* For a biographical note, see Appendix 1.

40. Ženský obzor (1907-8), VII, number 6.



Olga Stranská,\* writing on the women's pages of the progressive daily Cas argued that the Central Society had not developed along the same lines as the rest of the women's movement. It:

"... was the first society to bring feminism into being. However, it remained standing at that point in time, and now it is no longer a feminist society in the true sense of the word."<sup>41</sup>

Its tactics were dismissed, by Plamínková again:

"Women must surely already have realised that submitting petitions... is not work which is even worthy of mention."<sup>42</sup>

But her main objection was that the present moment was the wrong time to hold such a conference:

"If it had not been a question of celebrating the tenth anniversary of the society, the committee would of course have considered the important question of whether this year (or generally the present moment) was suitable for a celebratory conference... The inner circumstances are not favourable. We are at a point of change or differentiation within the women's movement. Modern currents are beginning to collide with the structure of those women's societies which are organised in a patriarchal way. Society, and women themselves, look at women's work more critically: today it is impossible to gather a definite number of women under one banner without having a unified ideological base."<sup>43</sup>

Stranská also pointed out that so far it had proved impossible to set up a united Czech women's society. What point was there in organising a conference to give the illusion of a unity which did not exist?

"The women's movement is growing with an inner strength and realising its aims, and it is no longer possible to act in unity and agreement as the Central Society wishes. Such an attempt is worthy, but it is typical of the period ten years ago, when there were not yet any other similar societies."<sup>44</sup>

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\* For a biographical note, see Appendix 1.

41. Cas, 19th July, 1908.

42. Ženský obzor, (1907-8), VII, number 9.

43. Ibid., number 6.

44. Cas, 19th July, 1908.

More important, perhaps, the 'moderates' and the 'radicals' found that this argument crystallised their differences about what the women's movement really needed at that time and what the aim of the conference should have been. The radicals thought that it should have produced a theory of the Czech women's movement.

Plamínková argued:

"To find the means, to illuminate the final end, to mould scattered attempts into a whole and to unite workers on that basis: to produce a creed for Czech women on the woman question and to place a line of confessors behind them, that is what we demand of a successful conference."<sup>45</sup>

The 'moderates' disagreed. For them, the fact that women were active, in whatever sphere, sufficed to show that they appreciated the importance of the woman question. Eliška z Purkyně, the president of the Central Society, wrote in Ženský svět:

"The creed of Czech women on the woman question has long been firm and clear and has its confessor in every thinking woman... At the conference, Czech women produced their creed - how they saw the activity and position of women in today's society... and this seems to me a great deal more significant than the repetition of a long since fulfilled creed on the woman question."<sup>46</sup>

Thus a continuing preoccupation with the "woman question", the disadvantages of being a woman in contemporary society, was dismissed as out of date by the moderates. It seems that they thought the problem had been solved because women were now active in society. They certainly did not warm to the idea put forward by Plamínková of working out a theory of women's emancipation, which presumably would link the women's movement more closely to general political activity.

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45. Ženský obzor, (1907-8), VII, number 9.

46. Ženský svět, (1908), XII, number 17.



The disagreement between the Club and the Central Society identified the different attitudes to women's emancipation with institutions, and gave critics of either a convenient institution to attack. But the criticism levelled in the first instance at the Central Society could be extended to a large number of women's societies. The 'backward' patriotic feminism of the majority of women was a source of anxiety and criticism for more 'progressive' women and men. The criticisms which were made of the first Czech women's conference, that the women at it were not enough concerned with working women and their problems, recur frequently in the development of the Czech women's movement. Even after the establishment of societies with a more liberal point of view than the Central Society most radical feminists still felt that there were a great many converts to their cause still to be made. In 1905 Zdenka Wiedermannová\* commented on this in an article in Ženská revue. She categorised most women's societies as 'immoral', interested only in singing, music, and sentimental philanthropy. They ought instead, she thought, to turn their attention to 'moral' questions; prostitution, the improvement of women's wages and working conditions. In short, they should try to include working-class women in their efforts:

"I see a piece of real patriotism in that, to work for the more profound education and moral elevation of the whole human race."<sup>47</sup>

By 1911, however, she felt the situation had hardly improved. An article by her in Právo ženy, "The democratisation of the Czech woman" complained that most Czech women's societies were far from

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\* For a biographical note, see Appendix 1.

47. Ženská revue, (1905), number 3.



being democratic, and were in fact 'dámské' (for ladies) and devoted to undemocratic charitable activity.<sup>48</sup>

That these old-fashioned patriotic women's societies were still preponderant and were choking the women's movements attempts to do anything more worthwhile may be possible, though it is hard to believe. It would appear, rather, that this constant criticism of "backward" women reveals more extensive disagreement within the women's movement about what its needs were and what the programme designed to fulfil them should be. The movement had developed and expanded under the influence of political and social change. Feminist ideas had become more popular; the movement had acquired a dynamic of its own. All these factors could not but lead to increased diversity. Different groups within the movement had different interpretations of its nature and its needs.

The second conference had brought out the divergence between the "old" feminists, who saw women's emancipation as an inevitable adjunct of liberal progress and the "new" ones, who judged that a feminist movement should be an independent force for social change. But even among those who thought that the achievement of feminist goals demanded substantial changes in social structures and political organisation there were divisions on how women should help this come about. On the one hand were the independent feminists - women who considered themselves to be above parties and argued that women should fight for themselves, since no-one else could be relied upon to fight for them. On the other hand were the political

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48. Právo ženy, (1911), I, numbers 17-19.

feminists who argued that one should put forward the feminist point of view within political parties and win them over: only with their understanding could real change be made.

The distinction between independent and political feminists was not hard and fast. Many of the latter had evolved from the former, and there were also several political feminists who became disillusioned with politics and went back to demanding freedom of action. All frequently lamented the ineffectiveness of the movement, and generally assumed that this stemmed from its lack of unity. They overlooked the fact that this had been a preoccupation ever since the movement had begun to be effective - what were the foundations of the Central Society and the Club if not an attempt to cope with disunity? - and assumed that unification was the obvious next step in the movement's development.

Uniting the movement by forming some umbrella organization was first suggested in 1904,<sup>49</sup> but nothing happened in this direction until the disagreements aired at the second conference prompted another attempt in 1909. In this year it was decided to found a Union of Czech Women's Societies, though it took three years before the plan became a reality. At the Union's foundation it was claimed that it represented 10,000 women in the Bohemian Lands and Lower Austria, but a closer examination reveals that this was rather an optimistic estimate of the strength of the Czech women's movement.

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49. <sup>✓</sup>Cas, June 1904. Zdenka Wiedermannová, speaking at the founding conference of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in Berlin, suggested that a united organisation might help Czech women to be more effective internationally.



The only societies to join it which could claim an active feminist record were the Central Society, the Czech Women's Club, the Association of Women Teachers and Vesna, (a Moravian society for the promotion of girls' education, which set up the first girls' high school in Moravia.)<sup>50</sup> Otherwise, of the 700 societies which started it, the majority were women's branches of Sokol, the nationalist gymnastic association, and most of the others were women's sections of nationalist organisations.<sup>51</sup> Almost the first thing that the Union did was to organise a conference.<sup>52</sup> This was really intended to give it some organisational framework. Fields of work had already been defined: there was an economic section, a peace section, an abstinence section and a social work section, as well as sections which dealt with organisation at home and abroad and with the organisation of young girls. Most of the conference was devoted to formally establishing these sections and deciding what issues they should concentrate on. Even when these decisions had been made, however, the Union moved slowly. It did not manage to do anything, apart from arrange a few public meetings, before the war broke out, and this curtailed its activities still further.

The only section which seems to have achieved something was the peace section. This held an action for anti-militarist toys for children in April 1913, and subsequently tried to become independent in order to be rid of the cumbersome ineffective Union. Pavla Moudrá, the head of the peace section,\* thought that many of the Union's

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50. Ženský svět, (1911), XV, p. 333.

51. Ibid., XVI, p. 55.

52. SÚA. PP/V 1908-15. 49/120.

\* For a biographical note, see Appendix 1.



problems were due to the personality of its president, Eliška Máchová.\* She was an old-style patriotic feminist who imprinted these characteristics on the Union.. All it did, according to Moudra was put flowers on patriots' graves, organise excursions and petitions. Whereas the individual societies who made up the Union had managed to arrange united actions on various issues, the Union itself organised nothing. Moudrá thought that progressive women should break away and form their own association, but she judged that quite a lot of societies, especially in the country, would probably stay with Máchová, being quite as old-fashioned and patriotic as she was.<sup>53</sup>

While the Union of Czech women's societies was still under discussion in 1910, a different proposal for uniting the women's movement was put forward by Františka Plamínková. This plan had several advantages over the Union, not least that its future structure had already been thought out. It was to be a committee (rada) rather than a union (svaz), subdivided into areas of interest which corresponded to existing organisations rather than trying to awaken interest in new fields. Each group would have a delegate, who must be an 'expert worker' on the committee, and it would publish a weekly journal. It would start off as a committee of Czech women but Plamínková hoped that it would expand to become a committee of Slav women in Austria.

It is interesting that Plamínková found it necessary to justify her plans in terms of women's joint action (or not) with men.

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\* For a biographical note, See Appendix 1.

53. LA PNP. Anna Bayerová, letters from Pavla Moudrá, 1912-14.

She argued for the committee as a temporary measure, until full co-operation between men and women was possible. At the moment women lagged behind men as far as education was concerned, and they needed to catch up and to achieve self-determination. Men's resistance to co-operation with women, 'male separatism' needed also to be broken down, and one way of doing this was to prove that women were capable of concerted political action.<sup>54</sup>

The idea of a women's committee came up again in 1913 in the progressive press as a result of widespread political agitation about a Czech Women's Suffrage Union. The committee was to have been composed of sections, in which the relevant societies would be proportionately represented. The activities would be controlled and co-ordinated by a central committee, which would have the function of calling a conference every three years to decide questions of ideology and programme.<sup>55</sup>

This plan, like the other, came to nothing: the outbreak of war made sure of that. Even the Union of Czech women's societies was reduced, during the war, to giving lectures on patent stoves and economical cookery. In the changed political conditions after the war a women's committee was a viable idea, and one was eventually established in 1923 with Plamínková at the head of it.

The failure of these attempts to unify the women's movement prompts one to ask what can have been the barriers to unity. The barrier perceived by most contemporary feminists was the continued

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54. Ženský klub český, výroční zpráva, 1911. Právo ženy, (1911), I, number 23.

55. Naše doba, (1913-4), XXI, pp. 191-2.



existence of the patriotic brand of feminism but, as has already been indicated, there were many more which they were only dimly aware of. There was, for example, the distinction between the independent feminists and the women organised in political parties. No party women are listed as functionaries of the Union of Czech Women's Societies.<sup>56</sup> The lack of co-ordination between the two groups was in part a function of the very political diversity existing in Bohemia, which made united action in any political matters very hard to achieve.

A comparison can be drawn here with the situation in Moravia, where both a united political front and a united women's organization were created in 1910-11 (see below). In addition, the political experience of Bohemian women, gained from the suffrage campaign, tended to make them sympathetic to independent feminism and more hostile to the political parties who, they thought, were putting obstacles in the path of the suffragists. But the most important barrier to unity was the contradictory view which women had of it. They wanted it because they thought it would lead to greater efficiency, but they overlooked the fact that some theoretical agreement was a necessary prerequisite of efficient productive co-operation. The disputes which went on between them tended to indicate that agreement was, in fact, impossible.

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56. SÚA. PP/V 1908-15. 49/120.



### Feminists and political parties

The political activity of women had an acceptable nationalist pedigree and even a few historical precedents. Even in the terms of the most outdated nationalist thinking women's self-assertion in political decision-making was desirable. We can identify two main ideological forces at work in the argument that women should participate in politics. On the one hand, there was the Czech democratic tradition, which was still seen to be very much a part of present day politics. A programme based on extensive democratic rights was a necessary adjunct for every Czech political party, and by the turn of the century all parties except the Old Czechs and the Clericals had universal suffrage on their programme. Five of them also supported women's suffrage and equal rights.<sup>57</sup> The other ideological pressure on women to participate in politics was that of the 'national interest'. The argument of the democratic tradition rested on the assumption that the Czech nation was in favour of women; that of the national interest evoked the picture of the embattled nation struggling for survival, needing all the help it could get to beat off the enemy. Women were part of the nation; they were nationalists and therefore, as politics and political activity became more accessible to everyone there was, at least in theory, an equal pressure on women to participate in them.

Additionally, the link in the feminist mind between national liberation and women's liberation needs to be emphasised here.

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57. They were the Realists, (Progressives), Radical Progressives, State Rights Radicals, Social Democrats and National Socialists.

Women in other countries, working within or against political systems which had majority acceptance could never share this state of mind. The vision of such a radical change as that which would be brought about by Czech national autonomy could not obscure for them the slow, patient, unrewarding process of pressing for small reforms. The methods they used were various, but the end result - even in terms of its impact on public opinion - was always unsatisfying. For Czech women the smallness of their actual achievements was compensated for by the knowledge that the future must bring a complete change, and that not only they but all Czechs were working to bring this about.

These arguments could, however, be doubled edged. While Czech women could work enthusiastically in an atmosphere of political acceptance that was unknown to their contemporaries in other countries they did fall into the trap of being taken in by the righteousness of their own cause. The belief that some indefinite national freedom would bring freedom for women as well was not combined with an appreciation of how limited this freedom might be in practice. Apart from the prejudices of male politicians, which women themselves had encountered so frequently, there was also the problem of what form this national freedom would actually take. After all, before 1917 the idea of an independent Czech national state seemed impossible to most people. The debate, such as it was, was rather on the basis of what form of federation or autonomy within the framework of the Habsburg Monarchy was acceptable. Even if the Czechs attained some degree of national independence this would hardly mean that they would be able to liberate women at a stroke. But an appreciation of this point is hard to find in Czech feminist writing. The only



attempt made by feminists to elaborate on the future of the nation was when Marie Tůmová stood as 'women's candidate' at Vysoké Mýto in 1908. Most of the political points she made in the women's programme related to representation - demanding the proportional representation of all nationalities in the Diet. She wanted the "reform of Bohemian economic relations," which presumably meant that Bohemia should become more self-sufficient. Her other demand was for "the assurance of an independent life to our nation and to individuals in our independent motherland".<sup>58</sup> This is hardly a blueprint for the future, nor for the part which women would play in it.

Thus for all Czech feminists' political involvement they did not really touch on the issues which preoccupied male politicians; and politicians considered their political activity to be secondary to the real thing, as carried on by men. This impression is confirmed by the form and content of women's organisation within political parties. Of the parties which included numbers of women, some had a structure which explicitly put women in second place. Others had an approach of complete equality, but this still did not mean that their women's sections expressed opinions on anything more than 'women's issues' - or that they would have paid attention to it if they had.

By 1914 women were included in the organisation of all Czech political parties, except the Clericals and the Old Czechs. Within the parties which represented, or aspired to represent, the mass of

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58. . See Chapter 6.



the working class - the Social Democrats and National Socialists - the existence of women's sections was taken for granted and their relationship to the rest of the party was the subject of considerable discussion and argument. Because they were mass parties their whole approach to organisation and recruitment was essentially different, and they are discussed in another chapter. The Young Czechs and the Agrarians had women's sections on a local level with a hierarchy which resembled that of the male party organisation culminating in an organising committee at the top. The Progressives (Realists) had women's groups but no separate structure for women. The State Rights Radical and State Rights Progressive parties were so small that separate organisations for women would have been out of the question.

Most women at the turn of the century, for example, those who attended the first conference, would probably have supported the Young Czechs. There were always a few men within the party who supported women's rights; Count Kounic in the 1870's and 1880's,<sup>59</sup> A. Adámek,<sup>60</sup> Körner, who put forward a bill for universal women's suffrage in the Diet. Kramář, the party leader, hardly seems to have given the issue a moment's thought, however. Although there was always a large number of women who had very little sympathy with the social radicalism of the Young Czechs' successor parties and might have been willing to join a Young Czech women's organisation, the party only established one in 1909, at a point when they had lost

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59. Count Kounic supported the question of women's education in the Reichsrat, and was also sympathetic to the demands of the working class.

60. A. Adámek handed in the first petition for women's university education. (K.V. Adámek, "Dr Rašín na právnické fakulty české", in: Rašínův památník, ed: B. Fousek, J. Penížek and J. Pimper, (Prague, 1927)).

most of their influence in the Reichsrat as a result of the universal suffrage reform. The establishment of a women's organisation was probably an aspect of the unsuccessful attempt to turn the party into a mass party. It was also undoubtedly a response to the rising level of women's political activity, a belated attempt to jump on the bandwagon of the women's suffrage campaign, although the party proved unwilling to support it in practice.<sup>61</sup>

The head of the Young Czech women's sections was Božena Víková Kunětická\* the novelist and playwright. Her political views were unorthodox; in fact, she regarded politics as rather unimportant. Spiritual things were what counted. She thought that the woman question was a cultural rather than a political phenomenon and that class differences were fundamentally insignificant when compared with the power of womanhood. Her allegiance to the Young Czechs can perhaps only be explained by her hostility to the 'crude materialism' of socialism,<sup>62</sup> but her contempt for the lower classes and their efforts to improve themselves were not shared by all her fellow members. One of them answered one of Víková Kunětická's many anti-materialist tirades thus:

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61. The Young Czechs were very unwilling to put up their own women candidates when urged to do so by the Women's Suffrage Committee, or to support the woman candidates of other parties.

\* For a biographical note, see Appendix 1.

62. As Víková Kunětická saw it, Social Democrats and their women members could fight for material gains (maternity leave, for example), but this possibility was, she thought, not open to middle-class women. And in any case, material gains were irrelevant to the women's movement. All women should be united by their spiritual qualities, their femininity. This should be their real contribution to politics.



"You attack those who could do no other than prepare a better future for themselves through thankless, painful work, who have managed thus to remove the most basic dependence on material things..."<sup>63</sup>

Initially, Víková Kunětická praised the freedom which the party allowed its women members,<sup>64</sup> but she rapidly became very critical of what she saw as the policy behind the establishment of the women's organisation:

"The party reorganised its women because it needs the modern decoration of some kind of slogan for itself."<sup>65</sup>

This impression was reinforced when she was elected to the Bohemian Diet in 1912, more in spite than because of her membership of the Young Czechs and the help of the party machine.<sup>66</sup> Her election to the Diet was the Young Czech women's only moment of glory; they do not seem otherwise to have taken much action as an identifiable political group. The statement that the women's organisation was only for decoration cut both ways: Young Czech women themselves do not seem to have tried very hard to become anything else.

The Agrarian party had been formed in the late 1890's from groups of agriculturalists who had left the Young Czechs, feeling

63. This was Zdenka Hásková-Dyková, a writer. She was the wife of Victor Dyk, a former progressive student and now a writer and member of the State Rights Radical party. Zd Hásková-Dyková-B. Víková - Kunětická, n.d. LA PNP Víková Kunětická.
64. B. Víková - Kunětická, Dílo, (Prague 1919-20), vol. 2, p. 100.
65. Naše doba, (1909-10), XVII, number 4.
66. The hesitation of the Young Czechs about whether or not to back Víková Kunětická meant that they did not publish much propaganda for her in their party press. After the election Víková-Kunětická acknowledged that the National Socialist press had been much more helpful to her in this respect. (Archiv čsl. strany socialistické: ženské hnutí 1898-1913. České slovo, 15th June, 1912; letter from Víková-Kunětická to České slovo, 16th June, 1912; letter from Young Czech women to České slovo, 24th June, 1912.)



them to be predisposed towards the great landowners. They had started off as a conservative force but under the leadership of Antonín Švehla they had gradually become more liberal. By 1907 they were the largest Czech party in the Reichsrat and by 1908 in the Diet; their slogan was "The countryside is one family". It was part of their policy to spread their net as wide as possible and to include special interest groups within their organisation. Thus they had sections for young people, for students, for academics, and also for women.

The women's section was formed in about 1900,<sup>67</sup> and by 1912 Agrarian women seem to have constituted the largest number of politically organised women in Bohemia, estimated at about 10,000.<sup>68</sup> They possessed quite extensive rights within the party structure and were allowed to become members of local executive committees, but they do not seem to have made use of these rights, despite pressure from male colleagues.<sup>69</sup> The attitude of male Agrarians to their women members is hard to ascertain; the women were far from vocal in the feminist press and do not seem to have produced a notable woman leader. One Agrarian M.P. in the Diet, Viškovský, supported a limited extension of women's suffrage - a very conservative position in the terms of the time,<sup>70</sup> but it is hard to discover what female supporters thought of this. The party urged its women members to vote in the 1907 Diet elections,<sup>71</sup> and even put up a woman

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67. J. César and B. Černý, "O ideologii českého agrarismu", ČsČh, 1959.

68. International Woman Suffrage Alliance, Congress report, (London, 1913).

69. Ženská revue, (1907-8), III, number 3.

70. See Chapter 6.

71. Čas, 5th May, 1907.

candidate at some point, but it was still not wholeheartedly in favour of women's rights and it is thus, perhaps, not surprising that no hardboiled female political activists emerged from its ranks.

The Progressive party had been formed out of the Realists (which Masaryk had started) in 1900. In 1908, after amalgamation with the Moravian People's party they became the People's Progressive Party. In the terms of the time their attitude to women was extremely unusual, but this was clearly due to the influence of Masaryk. This was the only party whose leader was so very strongly in favour of women's emancipation. Masaryk's ideas were of course central to the formation of the party and so we find that most leading Progressives were also outspoken supporters of feminism (Herben, Drtina, Laichter), and their wives were also active in the feminist movement. From the beginning the party had stated as a point of principle that women ought to be involved in politics. In 1906 they had made the statement "Woman should be placed on an equal level with man" a part of their programme: at the same time they developed a 'cultural programme', in which they included the areas where they considered it necessary to work for women's emancipation.<sup>72</sup>

In June 1907 the party's political club called a conference of progressive women to put these ideas into action. A committee was elected from the conference to organise women politically. In the next year it published numerous public appeals urging women in the party to organise themselves into 'working circles' so that they

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72. Ženská revue, (1906-7), II, number 9.



could obtain proper representation at the next party conference.<sup>73</sup> Female pressure and the desire for female membership must have been effective. At the 1908 conference, proportional representation for women was introduced. This meant that women were represented on party bodies in proportion to the number of them organised within the party. There was a statutory woman on the central committee. This was in fact positive discrimination in favour of women: it meant that their voice was certain to be heard.<sup>74</sup>

The 'woman programme' as developed at the next party conference listed the three most important tasks of progressive women:- educational work, to prepare a new generation of women for political struggles; the battle against institutions which lowered the value of women, like prostitution and alcoholism; and the fight for equal rights.<sup>75</sup>

Women in the progressive party had no women's sections. They formed women's groups within local party branches but these were not organisationally separate, and they had the same rights within the party as men. But in 1911 the party's policy of specially encouraging women changed. In place of proportional representation the 1911 conference introduced free competition. The equality which women enjoyed within the party was now extended into every sphere, and they had to compete with men for every position in the party hierarchy. Not surprisingly, some women in the party opposed this. They argued that women generally were not yet at the stage where they could

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73. Ženská revue, (1907-8), III.

74. Ženský obzor, (1910-11), X.

75. Ženský obzor, (1909-10), IX, number 1.



benefit from free competition, and that men were also still prejudiced against them. Introducing free competition would, moreover, only encourage women to imitate men rather than allow them to develop their own individual style of politics.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, women members themselves were divided on the question of positive discrimination. While Olga Stranská, the women's representative on the party central committee, supported it, and thought that the party should give women more time to develop their feminine individuality, Pavla Bůzková, in her pamphlet 'A progressive view of woman' was quite certain that women had only themselves to blame for their backwardness and that joining political parties on men's terms was their only way to regain some credibility in men's eyes.<sup>77</sup> While the view that women still needed time to develop their own approach to politics and should be unconditionally encouraged in everything they did still had some adherents, probably including Masaryk,<sup>78</sup> the view expressed by Bůzková reflected that of the majority of the party.

It is also worth noting that, whether or not people agreed on the kind of membership women should have, there was little disagreement about the activities to which women should devote themselves once they were members; moral reform and equal rights. Their equal status

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76. Ženský obzor, (1910-11), X.

77. Pavla Bůzková, Pokrokový názor na ženu, (Prague, 1909).

78. In the dispute over Progressive support of the Women's Suffrage Committee, Masaryk supported the Committee, with its line of "women's suffrage comes before everything else", and not his own party, which followed the Social Democratic line of fighting for universal suffrage to the Diet, with no special attention paid to women. (Masaryk a ženy, (Prague, 1930), pp. 121-6).

within the party, the proud assertion that they were not filed away into a women's section and then forgotten about is made less significant. There seems to be little indication, either, that they tried to go beyond the limits of the role assigned to them. They were active in the anti-prostitution and abstinence movements, and also in the women's suffrage campaign. But they do not seem to have attempted any independent analysis, either of the women's movement in relation to contemporary Czech politics, or of the political situation as a whole from a feminist point of view. This is especially noteworthy in view of their advocacy of political organisation versus feminist organisation. In their debates with the Women's Suffrage Committee they argued that joining a political party was a way of linking the women's movement with a specific programme of political demands, but they do not seem to have seen the implications of this statement for their own activity.

#### Women's organisation in Moravia

The contrasts between organisation in Bohemia and Moravia may help to explain some of the factors in the Bohemian situation. Women's organisation in Moravia developed along the same lines as political organisation. By 1911 all the political parties in Moravia except the Clericals had managed to form a united "progressive bloc" with the aim of opposing landowning and clerical influence in the Reichsrat and Diet elections. 1911 also saw the establishment of the Organisation of Progressive Women in Moravia. Unlike the Progressive Bloc it did not unite women of different political parties but provided the impetus for initial organisation among women of fairly wide-ranging views all over the province.



If one extrapolates from the Bohemian situation criteria of political mobilisation and applies them to Moravia it becomes clearer why Moravia was so different: the main reason being that it was several decades behind Bohemia in industrial and political development. One such criterion of political mobilisation would be industrialisation. Large-scale industry and an industrial proletariat developed later in Moravia than in Bohemia: the same was true of working class organisation. Although Moravian Social Democrats had in the 1890's formed the greater part of Social Democratic activists, the province had lost its leading position in the movement by 1900 and thereafter lagged behind Bohemia. Another such factor in Czech political life was nationalism. Although one clearly cannot quantify nationalism one can at least look at the institutions through which it expressed itself, set up initially to foster national culture. Here also one finds that such institutions were established later in Moravia than Bohemia (the Matice česká dated from 1831, the Matice moravská from 1848). It is, therefore, as another aspect of these differences that one has to see the development of political parties within Moravia. The first liberal party in Bohemia, the Young Czechs, had formally constituted itself in 1878, though it had existed as a fraction of the Old Czech party since 1869. But its counterpart in Moravia, the Moravian People's Party, was not formed till 1891, the time of the zenith of Young Czech power in Bohemia.

Moravian parties were on the whole not branches of Bohemian parties. They were independent, with different policies and a different powerbase from their Bohemian equivalents. The two main forces which informed Moravian political groupings were the power of the great landowners (this especially because Moravia was a more



agricultural province than Bohemia) and the power of the Catholic Church (again stronger in Moravia than Bohemia). To stand out against privilege and against clericalism was nothing new: it was a restatement of the principles of 1848. But both these forces were strong enough in Moravia for this stand to be politically viable. At the turn of the century there were really three political parties in Moravia, the People's party, the National party and the Catholic National party, of which the People's party was the most radical. Like the Young Czechs it was committed to universal suffrage. At the same time there existed in Moravia several radical political organisations influenced originally by the Progressive movement and thinking along the same lines as the Czech progressive parties and the Realists.<sup>79</sup> In 1905 all these (with the exception of Young Moravia) joined together to form the Progressive party. 1905 was in fact the year in which Moravian political organisation really began to coalesce. This was the year of the Moravian Agreement, in which the Diet franchise was recast in the mould of the Reichsrat franchise of 1896: that is, with a fifth curia, elected on the basis of manhood suffrage, added to the other four.<sup>80</sup> However, the Agreement in no way diminished the influence of the great landowners and clericals in the Diet. It was only the National and Clerical parties who supported the measure: all the other parties, having advocated universal suffrage, were against it precisely on the grounds that it

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79. Organizace pokrokové práce; Antiklerikální liga na Moravě; Politický spolek pro severní Moravu a Olomouci; Mladá morava; Pokrokový spolek politický pro Moravu.

80. It was also divided along national lines, with electors voting in nationally delimited districts, and members being arranged in national curiae in the Diet.

still managed to favour the propertied classes. Opposition to the Agreement led to greater unity among the forces that opposed it, and it simultaneously extended the franchise enough to allow them greater representation in the Diet.

This joint oppositional stance led to greater co-operation between parties. The Progressive party, Young Moravia and the People's party joined forces in 1909 to become the People's Progressive party. In the 1911 Reichsrat elections it, the National Socialists and the Social Democrats formed the Progressive Bloc, united on a common platform of opposition to landowning and clerical interests. This unity was effective in terms of electoral policy and winning Reichsrat seats. The theoretical compromise involved for both sides in the alliance between Social Democracy and bourgeois political parties was clearly outweighed by the practical advantage of having more representation. But the alliance certainly did not mean that the progressive parties had gone very far towards adopting any of the 'social' demands of the Social Democrats' programme. As far as demands for women's equality were concerned the People's party had consistently failed to adopt any attitude to the 'woman question' and its leader Adolf Stránský had on several occasions shown himself hostile to women's emancipation and their participation in political parties. The Progressive party was the only one which had always supported demands for women's rights as part of its electoral policy.<sup>81</sup> When it joined the People's party, however, this part of its policy was clearly abandoned and it was only at the beginning of 1911 under

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81. Ženská revue, (1906-7), II, p. 84.



pressure from the Organisation of Progressive Women that the People's Progressive Party put women's rights on its programme.<sup>82</sup>

The 'Organisation of Progressive Women in Moravia' was started in 1910. In one way it is clear that its foundation was a response to the same factors that prompted the formation of the Progressive Bloc. In the case of the women's organisations it was not so much a need to combat the influence of the great landowners, since their entrenched institutional power could only practically be of peripheral interest, but a need to oppose clericalism which formed the basis of much of the work done by individual organisations. What is interesting is that here National Socialist, Social Democrat and Progressive women were willing to sink their many differences for the sake of this campaign, whereas in Bohemia there was no single issue which was seen as so important to both sides that they could unite around it. Moravian Social Democratic women, when criticised by their Bohemian counterparts, justified their action by arguing that most of the women in the Organisation of Progressive Women were teachers and low grade officials, and thus made up an 'intellectual proletariat'. They argued that the struggle in Moravia was mainly cultural, centring on anti-clericalism, particularly in education - an issue which was much more important in Moravia than Bohemia. They also pointed to the fear of Germanisation which existed in Moravia and which a united Czech women's organisation would help to combat.<sup>83</sup>

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82. Právo ženy, (1911), I, number 1.

83. Ženský list, (1912), numbers 23 and 31.



But it is equally clear that the organisation was formed because Moravian women were forced to rely on themselves to produce any politically oriented feminist organisation. If bourgeois women could not take the step of joining National Socialist or Social Democratic women's organisations (and the participation of both these parties in the OPW certainly also had an ulterior motive in that they wanted to attract members)<sup>84</sup> there was no welcome for women within the People's Progressive Party. Its attitude was not particularly favourable to the pursuit of women's demands: moreover, the general concentration on electoral tactics ruled out any more subtle theoretical considerations. It must also be remembered that because of the Moravian Agreement of 1905 women's suffrage and the Diet electoral law was not a live political issue in Moravia. Women in Bohemia could use the whole question of women's suffrage to the Diet as a means of pressing political parties to state their commitment to the cause. At least they could give themselves the illusion sometimes of having won parties over to their side. Moravian women, however, were confronted by the realisation that there was much preliminary work to be done before they could assert themselves politically. The Organisation of Progressive Women therefore concentrated on grassroots organisation. It was union of existing societies but it aimed above all to found new ones.

Previous attempts to organise women in Moravia had been scattered. A 'Moravian Silesian Women's Organisation' had been set up in 1898 but does not seem to have been very extensive.<sup>85</sup> A women's

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84. *Ibid.*, number 23.

85. M. Dorazilová, Vývoj pokrokového ženského hnutí na Moravě, (Brno, 1928).

conference in 1902 resulted in the division of the women's movement into two different directions. One was led by Eliška Mačková, (later the head of the Union of Czech Women's Societies,) and was oriented towards united action with Bohemian women - it does not seem to have been very popular. The other direction was identified with Zdenka Wiedermannová, a teacher, who founded the Association of Moravian Women Teachers in the same year. In the next few years she and the Association were active in promoting the cause of girls' secondary education in Moravia.<sup>86</sup> In 1905 she founded the periodical Ženská revue. It was from this current in the women's movement that the Organisation of Progressive Women arose. It was always associated with 'progressive' - the term was always vague - and particularly anti-clerical sentiments. Since the movement had originated in women's educational organisations and most of its leaders were teachers this was hardly surprising. By 1909, having founded two girls' schools and a journal, Moravian women decided to branch out into something larger. After nearly a year of preparations the Organisation of Progressive Women finally had its founding meeting in May 1910.<sup>87</sup> Originally it had been planned to set up a sdrůžení pokrokových žen i.e. a formal organisation, but the application for this was refused and so a 'free organisation' was set up instead. The central organisation was divided into four sections which covered all the areas of possible action, organisation, culture, social and political. This in fact left local branches a perfectly free hand to do what they liked. Courses for mothers and

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86. 1903. "Dívčí akademie" society founded.  
 1907. Society founds gymnasium in Valašské Meziříčí.  
 1908. Society founds gymnasium in Brno.  
 87. Ženská revue, (1911), VI, p. 250.



entertainments for children were especially popular, though there were also a considerable number of lectures on politics and feminism.

The strength of the Organisation of Progressive Women was its widespread and broadly based organisation. At the bottom were local groups; then came regional organisations and then the central provincial committee. By the conference of June 1911 six regions were organised. Within each region there were branches in all the large towns and attempts were made to arrange at least individual events - e.g. lectures - in smaller places. The interesting thing about the organisation is that it was not on the whole a synthesis of previously existing groups but something completely new. According to newspaper reports, membership was also very broadly based. It did not attract only young educated women, the inevitable teachers, post office clerks, and so on but also servant girls, young working women and young women from the countryside.

#### The feminist press.

Czech women may have failed to achieve unity, they may have felt discriminated against in the parties they joined, but the existence of a thriving feminist press in Bohemia and Moravia provides incontrovertible evidence of a high level of interest and discussion. In 1914 there were five women's journals in Bohemia, and two in Moravia which one could call feminist or socialist - bearing in mind that the term 'feminist' itself covered many shades of political opinion - and there were supported and read by a female Czech-speaking population of approximately three million. Unfortunately, except in the case of Ženský list, where figures were



published regularly by the Social Democrats, it is impossible to discover what sort of circulation these journals had. One thing, however, is certain; none of the people who ran them were rich enough to let them run persistently at a loss. If they had been unsuccessful they would have been closed down, as indeed some were. It appears, in fact, that the market for such journals had not yet been exhausted; in 1914 plans by the Masaryks, Plaminkova, and others to found another were interrupted by the war.

The oldest of these women's magazines was Ženské listy. Founded in 1871, it was still going strong in the 1920's. It remained throughout the voice of the most conservative nationalist brand of feminism, of Eliška Krásnohorská, even though she ceased to edit it in 1905. But until 1892 it was the only serious journal for women - until 1896 the only one for middle class women - and so it probably had a wider readership than its politics might suggest. When, for example, Karla Máchová visited the U.S.A. she wrote little articles about her travels to be published in Ženské listy and helped to found a sister paper for American Czechs, Chicago Ženské listy. Ženské listy took a great interest in Czech women's history and undoubtedly played an important part in publishing the letters and memoirs of many famous Czech women; for example, Johana Fričová, Bohuslava Rajská, Honorata Zapová and Božena Nemcová. In addition it published articles on the women's movement abroad, particularly among Slav women (the Poles, the Russians, the South Slavs.) A large part of Ženské listy was, however, taken up with indifferent belles lettres, articles on the role of women in the national struggle and news of the Women's Czech Industrial Society. Its popularity declined when new journals came on the scene, but it was nevertheless

infinitely respectable and as such was subscribed to by respectable institutions, like schools and libraries, from where it could act as a point of contact with the women's movement.

It was not until 1896 that anything emerged to challenge Ženské listy's monopoly. This was the first Ženský obzor (Women's horizon), edited by Vit Kellner, a progressive student who later joined the Radical State Rights party. This Ženský obzor did not last long (lack of support forced it to close at the end of 1896) but despite its short life it made a significant contribution to feminist journalism.

Whereas Ženské listy was run by women, Ženský obzor was edited and controlled by men, but welcomed women as co-workers. All participants, male and female, had been strongly influenced by the progressive student movement. The male contributors, e.g. Antonín Hajn, had been actively involved in it; the women were mostly too young, being either still at school (Minerva) or just starting university.<sup>88</sup> Politically, Ženský obzor took a fairly left wing line. Its declared aim was to bring the feminist movement and the working class women's movement closer together by making the feminist movement more sensitive to working women's demands and ridding it of its old fashioned nationalist tendencies.<sup>89</sup> Ženský obzor was especially critical of its feminist forerunner Ženské listy, its creation, the Výrobní spolek, and its narrow outlook on the world.

88. See Chapter 3.

89. Antonín Hajn, "K charakteristice ženského hnutí u nás", Ženský obzor, (1896), numbers 15-16.

It gave a feminist voice to the opinions which progressives had long had of Krásnohorská and her supporters.<sup>90</sup>

When Ženský obzor was forced to cease publication it concluded that the time was not yet ripe for people to accept the ideas it had been printing. But its existence, though short, was a sign of the times. In the next four years two more journals, owing more to Ženský obzor than to Ženské listy in format and approach came into being.

The first Czech women's conference in 1897 prompted the establishment of Ženský svět (Women's world), edited by the writer Teréza Nováková.\* As its origins suggest, Ženský svět was not all as radical as Ženský obzor, but it nevertheless printed a much greater variety of articles than Ženské listy ever had. It reported on women's increasing political involvement in the Social Democratic and National Socialist parties, while always asserting its difference from the socialists, and the special problems faced by middle class women in politics. It carried some major original articles, many of them by Nováková; for example, the results of her investigation of women's home work in Bohemia. It concerned itself with predictable causes - women in the professions, like teachers and post office workers (it had a special section for these in 1905-6), women's societies, girls' education. After 1900 it was the official organ of the Central Czech Women's Society and so had regular reports

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90. The Časopis pokrokového studentstva, (1896), number 8 had accused the Výrobní spolek of being old-fashioned and clerical. Ženský obzor entered into this in the article by Hajn, above, and in an attack on Minerva.

\* For a biographical note, see Appendix 1.



on its activity and progress. Its point of view in the crucial debates of the women's movement; for example, the debate on Minerva and over the second women's conference, always reflected that of the Central Society, though it continued to report the doings of the Czech Women's Club in detail. It published the work of Czech women writers, aspiring and established, and also many translations of belles lettres and theoretical articles from various languages.

In 1900 a husband and wife - he a former progressive student, she an active feminist<sup>91</sup> - began to produce a new Ženský obzor. This version had few, if any links with its predecessor, but it shared some of the same political assumptions. It was more radical, more disposed to seek some identification with the socialist women's movement than was Ženský svět. Ideologically it was linked to the Czech Women's Club: whenever it came to an argument with the Ustřední spolek it was Ženský obzor in which the Club women expressed their point of view. It was also the main forum for debates about the Women's Suffrage Committee, in which the Committee usually defended itself against attacks from the Progressives. Ženský obzor published a relatively small amount of literature and concentrated more on the women's movement at home and abroad. For example, it paid considerable attention to the anti-feminist work of Laura Marholm<sup>92</sup>

91. Jan Ziegloser was involved in the Omladina trial and later wrote a book on it. Anna Ziegloserová was a member of the Czech Women's Club and a writer.

92. Laura Marholm's most famous work was Das Buch der Frauen (Modern Woman, London, 1895). In it she described six women, each of whom she classified as a type - the learned, the neurotic, the women's rights campaigner, etc. - and attempted to draw from this the moral that womanly feelings always assert themselves in spite of everything. For her, the most important thing was woman's influence as woman, and this could never really be fully developed until she had married, for woman without man was nothing.

and the popular ideas of Ellen Key.<sup>93</sup> A strong Masarykian influence can usually be detected in its content: it frequently printed his articles on women or had articles itself discussing the approach to the women's movement which he had made popular. Its interest in the domestic women's movement is also shown in articles devoted to the political problems of women in and out of political parties, the difficulties of organisation, and so on. It gave publicity to women's fight for equality within Sokol,<sup>94</sup> and was altogether more politically

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93. Ellen Key was a Swedish writer who dealt with the problems of marriage and bringing up children in contemporary society. She advocated freer divorce, so that loveless marriages could be ended painlessly. Her main concern, however, was children. She thought that women bringing up children should be maintained by the community during the first three years of the child's life - as long as the mother had completed a course in hygiene and child care and did not have too many children. This would reduce women's dependence on men and would make child care a recognised alternative to having a career. (Ellen Key, Love and marriage (New York, 1911).
94. Although Sokol was one of the oldest nationalist societies actively to involve women (the Telocvičný spolek paní a dívek pražských had been founded in 1869), it does not appear to have set much store by their equal participation. They seem to have made the tea and provided the decoration at patriotic ceremonies. They were organised separately from men and had no voting rights in the Sokol organisation. A women's conference did exist but it had no power. By 1908-9 women in Sokol were coming to resent their unequal status, and demanded equality and equal representation on all committees and administrative bodies. (Zenský obzor, (1907-8), III, numbers 7 and 9.) But the men within Sokol resisted this strongly; they were in favour of women being completely separate and having no say in anything but women's business. The eventual decision on the question, which was taken in 1912, allowed each 'jednota' (unit) to decide for itself and so made no binding policy. The issue naturally aroused the anger of progressive feminists. Both Zenská revue and Zenský obzor gave it a lot of coverage and the Women's Suffrage Committee sent its members to speak at meetings on the subject. Sokol's imperviousness to feminist propaganda provides an illuminating counterweight to the popular feminist belief in the instinctive feminism of the Czech nation.

involved than Ženský svět, which simply allowed itself to be used as a spokeswoman for the Central Society when absolutely necessary. Both of them continued through the First World War into the First Republic.

The other two Bohemian women's journals were of course the Social Democratic Ženský list (1892-1914) and the National Socialist Ženské snahy (1908-1914).

The Moravian women's movement seems to have resented being forced to rely on journals printed in Prague, and in 1905 a woman teacher Zdenka Wiedermannová, started to produce a Moravian one, Ženská revue (Women's Review). Ženská revue resembled Ženský obzor most of all, but the (somewhat eccentric) personality of its editor was much more strongly imprinted on it than Ziegloserová's on Ženský obzor. Ženská revue devoted a lot of attention to separate organisations and interest groups within the movement. It reported women's meetings at length, and also had many regular supplements: for women teachers, children, progressive women, and on women's rights (though none of them lasted the entire life of the journal). As with Ženský obzor, the influence of Masaryk was easily detectable; there were frequently articles on his ideas, and more general ones on the moral responsibilities of women and the women's movement. (Wiedermannová always acknowledged his influence on her feminist development). As befitted a magazine started by a teacher there were many articles on women's education and the lot of women teachers. As women's political activity increased, so did Ženská revue's coverage of it. It devoted its attention mainly to the Progressives in Bohemia and Moravia, and the Social Democrats, with whose women's movements they claimed the closest affinity.



Ženská revue believed in involving its readers in discussions of importance to the women's movement. Sometimes it printed articles designed to provoke a discussion, which then continued for several months. Two of these articles are particularly interesting because they show the level of thinking in the women's movement as a whole, not just in Ženská revue, and also because they aroused the greatest amount of hostile comment. One of them was a proposal to introduce compulsory social service for women, which would be equivalent to compulsory military service for men. It echoed ideas then current in the conservative wing of German feminism. It was thought that some kind of compulsory service for women would undermine one of the objections commonly raised to women's suffrage, that women did not perform military service. Moreover, the kind of duties it would entail, nursing and domestic service, were suited to women's temperament and would, moreover, train them in their future role as wives and mothers. The writer of the article thought that the length of the service should be in inverse proportion to the length of a girl's education - the longest possible term would be five years. Girls who had not done this social service, he suggested, would be forbidden to marry, and having sexual relations with them would be a criminal offence. Needless to say, objections to this plan poured in. Some argued that it discriminated against working class girls, who would have to work for five years without the pay their families needed, and said that it would be preferable to socialise housework, rather than train all girls to be housewives. Others attacked it from a different angle, maintaining that the assumption that women's inescapable fate was social work and men's the army was mistaken, and indeed damaging to the cause.<sup>95</sup>

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95. B. Kalandra, "Všeobecně povinná sociální služba žen", Ženská revue, (1905-6), February-March.

Four years later another article which demonstrated a similar disregard for the working class was published. The title alone is revealing, "Are servants people?" (Jest služka také člověk?) and the discussion centred on how one should treat one's servants; as workers, with regular hours and conditions, or as members of the family. The assumption behind almost every contribution was that the women who read Ženská revue employed servants. It had clearly not crossed anyone's mind that a servant would read the journal, and in fact many proposals put forward also suggested that any free time servants had should be spent improving themselves. Nobody suggested that employing a servant might be unnecessary.<sup>96</sup>

In 1910 Wiedermannová started a women's rights supplement to Ženská revue called Právo ženy: in 1911 she turned this into a full-scale monthly journal. It concentrated mainly on political news, national and international, the Bohemian women's suffrage campaign and the position of women in Czech political parties, and information about the women's suffrage movement elsewhere, often culled from the pages of Jus Suffragii (the journal of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance). Wiedermannová also used this opportunity to publish her ideas on the present and future of the Czech women's movement. Even more than Ženská revue, Právo ženy was very much her paper and reflected her ideas. All major theoretical articles were contributed by her. She undoubtedly dominated the Moravian feminist press. It was not so varied, politically or culturally, as that in Bohemia. Ženská revue published very little literature

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96. "Jest služka také člověk?", Ženská revue, (1910), May-December.

and Právo ženy almost none. They were a curious mixture of progressive approaches and dotty ideas, though their concentration on politics also reflects the comparatively united and purposeful nature of the Moravian women's movement.

In addition to these specifically feminist publications, other newspapers and journals often had a substantial 'women's page'. These were devoted to much the same issues and rarely printed a recipe or a dress pattern. The women's page of the monthly Naše doba and the daily Čas, both organs of the Progressive party, were the most important and serious of these. Naše doba, which started in 1893 and was edited by Masaryk, had always paid a certain amount of attention to the women question. In 1904-5 it printed a section entitled 'The woman question', but this did not continue. Masaryk was keen that something of the kind should appear, however, and in 1909 a 'women's movement' section was started, edited by Olga Stranská. It appeared monthly and often carried substantial articles which discussed the present complexion of the women's movement, the way it might and should develop. Stranská was particularly interested in the moral issues prompted by women's emancipation, the Masarykian 'moral equality' and how this would affect the family. As a member of the Progressive party she was also concerned with the relationship between middle class and working class women: as a "politically organised woman" she criticised the composition of the Women's Suffrage Committee and urged joint action on the Czech women's movement. The pages of Naše doba are an important source of some of the more thoughtful contributions to the debate which raged round the women's suffrage movement - to which Stranská was a principal contributor.



Stranská also contributed to the women's section of Čas, although she was not in charge of it. The section started in 1908, at the time of Tůmová's first attempt to be elected to the Diet. It generally appeared once a month, rotating with Čas's other supplements on culture, social question, education, etc. The matter covered was much more topical; there was frequent news about the Progressive party's women's organisation and, especially in 1908 and 1909, when the Women's Suffrage Committee had a woman candidate standing somewhere or other, discussions about the nature of the campaign and the Committee. Being a daily paper, Čas was in a position to carry frequent reports of election campaigns, outside the framework of the women's section. (It was the only daily paper to do so regularly.) The women's sections also reported on women's political activity in other contexts, for example, in the Social Democratic party. At the end of 1909, however, it ceased to appear. Complaints from readers elicited the reply that there had not been enough people to keep it going. Articles on questions of interest to women continued to appear intermittently up till April 1910 and then ceased: after that, apart from a few reports of individual events, Čas's intensive coverage of the women's movement came to an end.

### Feminist ideas

Czech feminists' picture of the ideal world was inevitably coloured by the necessity of first achieving national liberation, and the assumption that this would bring women's liberation in its train. In the terms of Czech nationalist ideology it was quite possible to say that Czech nationalists were instinctive feminists

and would provide women with all the rights they needed. As the feminist movement developed, however, it became increasingly clear to most of its supporters that one could not take men's sympathy for granted, and that equal rights alone were not enough. Even when women had an equal education, for example, or had gained equivalent status they found that the professions they wanted to follow were closed to them. The widespread existence of prostitution made it clear that women were not valued even as people. Feminists everywhere came to think that there was more to equality than just equal rights; a change in attitude was also necessary. Men still regarded women as inferior, and the generally patronising and contemptuous attitude of men towards women could be nowhere more clearly demonstrated than within marriage and the family. Attitudes towards women underlay the structure of society; legal changes could not be fully successful until these deep-rooted prejudices gave way to more modern ideas.

The strand in feminist thought which demanded a change in attitudes to women was powerful among Czechs because it so closely corresponded to the ideas of Masaryk. Furthermore, it was natural that Czech feminists should place such emphasis on moral transformation, since political transformation was so far distant. A change in people's attitudes was a necessary preparation for national freedom, a further guarantee that it would promise freedom also for women.

To try to change people's ways of thinking about women it was necessary to define what these were and how they were formed, and this involved an examination of the family and women's personal relationships, rather than their professional ambitions. Feminists justified the need for a change in attitude - or "moral transformation",

as Masaryk called it - in two sometimes mutually contradictory ways. On the one hand there was the more traditional argument that women were discriminated against just because they were women; that they were perfectly capable of being men's equals if only men would realise it. The essence of the other argument was that the contribution to society which women made as women - mostly in the family - was undervalued, because society was attuned to esteem male achievements rather than female virtues. Following this line of argument women could say that society needed women because of the special contribution which they could make to it, and that it should take more account of womanhood in general:

"Equal rights is not enough for us, we want our rights, the rights of women, the rights of womanhood." (zenství)<sup>97</sup>

But despite this emphasis on the power of womanhood, echoed by women as different as Tereza Nováková and Božena Víková-Kunětická, no Czech women ever felt that this could be a substitute for economic independence or political rights, but would rather have to complement them. Olga Stranská saw the difficulties involved in achieving and making use of economic and political freedoms. Paid work, she observed, was often hardly liberating, and political rights had been drawn up by men and did not necessarily answer women's needs. To achieve her goal of spiritual independence for women an improvement in the relations between men and women was also needed. Men must learn to look at women differently, but women must also learn to become companions to men.<sup>98</sup>

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97. Olga Stranská, "Účast ženy na politickém životě národa," first published 1908-14, in Za novou ženu (Prague, 1920).

98. Olga Stranská, "Otázka české ženy", first published 1911-14, reprinted in Za novou ženu.



Most Czech feminists had some criticisms to make of family relationships. At one end of the scale Tereza Nováková argued that something must be done to make it possible for women to combine motherhood and work. At the moment, she said, women had the choice of being either a slave in the family or an unmarried, professional woman, but no woman was complete until she was able to combine motherhood with a career.<sup>99</sup>

At the other extreme, Olga Stranská went deeper to try to expose the nature of the marriage relationship sanctified by contemporary society. She thought that the main problem of women's emancipation was the relationship between men and women, and in her pamphlet, "The woman question from a progressive standpoint", she said:

"With the development of the women's movement women became aware of their relationship to men. They recognised that it shows disrespect for women, a disrespect which does not disappear with marriage but is emphasised by the patriarchal nature of the family, which has deprived women of their legal and social rights.

They discovered the contradiction between the idea of the family and the reality, for prostitution could flourish alongside the family and be considered indispensable.

The family could be idealised because a multitude of women were degraded by prostitution. Disrespect for women did not disappear; it was simply shifted on to a certain class of women. And here they realised that women's relationship to man is regulated not only by laws but by unwritten, inexpressible rules in their closest inner relationship, which are not always in agreement with written laws and customs."<sup>100</sup>

These "unwritten rules" affected all women; the "disrespect" was general, even though it was actively expressed only against a certain

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99. Tereza Nováková, "Povolání a duševní práce žen v poměru k rodině", (1908), reprinted in Ze ženského hnutí, (Prague, 1911).

100. Ženská revue, (1909), I IV, October.

class of them. Women's new awareness would, argued Stranská in another article, lead them to seek new forms of relationship with men, one which did not allow these distinctions to be made, or even to exist.

"The social order... divides women into three groups: wives, subject to their husbands, whose duty is to have a sexual life and bear children even if they do not want to; single woman, separate from men, for whom motherhood is considered a crime; and prostitutes. In every way this is an assault on human nature... While women were still a dumb, unorganised mass this state of affairs could continue... (but now they have become aware of it)... they have realised that the whole sex suffers under the same conditions and is robbed of a happier, more joyful existence. Initial anger against luckier men gave way to a deeper realisation that man also had not attained the height of culture because his mate remained his toy... Now a woman who is conscious of the fact that the dominance of one sex over the other cannot continue for ever... tries to achieve a recognition of her female self. She understands evolution and tries not to oppose it but to equalise the gap between women and mothers and to remove the threat between women and men... Dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs... is general, and people are looking for ways of reform... They have come to weigh up the usefulness of modern forms of marriage and to decide which forms correspond to modern views... But it is not the form itself but primarily the spirit which is responsible for the moral decline of today. It is necessary to elevate the spiritual and moral level of men and women... A new form for this new marriage will then arise of its own accord."<sup>101</sup>

But she, in common with all other Czech feminists, nevertheless saw the family as central to women's existence; in a way, as part of the fulfilment they had been fighting for. Most of them seem to have opposed not only abortion but also contraception. On the phenomenon that women were choosing not to have children, Tereza Nováková commented:

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101. Naše doba, (1912-13), XX, pp. 76-79.

"I am surprised that the long fight to elevate and liberate women could bring such a result."<sup>102</sup>

Stranská wrote that she thought a widespread use of contraception would cause irresponsibility. Women were not suited to sexual life anyway, she thought, and the use of contraception would only make them suffer more, through having to have sex more often.<sup>103</sup>

Criticism of the family was linked to criticism of prostitution. The parallels between the situation of wives and that of prostitutes seemed obvious, and the idea that women did not enjoy sex for its own sake lent additional weight to this. Initially, feminists had tended to think of prostitution as an individual and not a social evil. Adopting the prevailing attitudes they had argued that prostitutes were wicked people who deserved to be punished, not pitied.<sup>104</sup> Gradually, however, this view came to be replaced by one which looked more closely at the society in which prostitution was commonplace, and condemned it rather than the individual.

These views were first expressed in England in the 1870's by Josephine Butler in her campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts. Butler's view was that the blame for prostitution lay not so much on the prostitute herself as on the institutions - the police and the state - which condoned or encouraged it. All legislation to control prostitution assumed that the woman was the

102. Tereza Nováková, "Vražda nezrozených" (1905), reprinted in Ze ženského hnutí.

103. Olga Stranská, "Neomalthusianství" (1911), reprinted in Za novou ženu.

104. This was the opinion of those at the first Czech women's conference. (Zpráva o prvním sjezdu...)



guilty party. The police could force any woman whom they suspected of being a prostitute to submit to examination for venereal disease; prostitutes were forced to register as such and were thus prevented ever from escaping from prostitution.<sup>105</sup> The law was made by men to protect men, under the assumption that prostitution was a necessary evil. Women's interests, the motives which drove them into prostitution in the first place, were not examined or thought to be relevant. The sexual morality which these laws expressed was the morality of the double standard, which allowed sexual freedom to men but outlawed the women who were the victims of this very freedom.

A campaign against the state regulation of prostitution had become a feature of feminist movements in most countries by the last decade of the nineteenth century. In the Austrian Empire both national differences and the ban on women's political activity made it hard to organise a large-scale campaign and little was attempted, but certainly in Bohemia the question was widely discussed; even the Central Society eventually formed an anti-prostitution section.

Bohemian women's opposition to the state regulation of prostitution was lent an additional dimension by the fact that the state whose legislation maintained the double standard and humiliated women was Austrian. It was assumed that a Czech state would have

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105. In Austria until the First World War prostitution was regulated on a local basis by the individual police authority. There were no national guidelines on how this should be done. The laws prevailing in Vienna and Budapest were liberal by the standards of the day, but statistics show that they completely failed to deal with the problem - in Vienna there were 1,689 prostitutes registered out of an estimated total of 30,000. (Abraham Flexner, Prostitution in Europe, (New York, 1913), p. 146.

the interests of women at heart and - with its high moral standards - would not allow this to happen. In terms of the eventual goals they aspired to the ideas of the abolitionists were similar to those of T.G. Masaryk, though his understanding of social attitudes to women went much further than theirs. It is easy to understand why they found wide acceptance within the Bohemian feminist movement. Those who wished to abolish the state regulation of prostitution wanted to abolish the double standard. In doing this they did not want to extend to women the sexual freedom which had previously been enjoyed only by men, but rather to make both sexes conform to the standard of behaviour hitherto imposed on women. The single standard of morality would mean chastity outside marriage and monogamy within it. Men would be thus brought up to the level of women, as Masaryk had so often argued, and the importance of the values associated with women could be reasserted.

The importance attached by the feminists to moral transformation encapsulates many of the differences which existed between them and the socialist movement. Although both they and the socialists considered family life to be very important, their analysis of the family and the ways in which it oppressed women were diametrically opposed. Feminists thought it would change if people did; socialist women thought that only the downfall of the capitalist system could liberate family relations. One could argue that socialists would have benefitted from a deeper understanding of the nature of human relationships such as Masaryk possessed, but it is equally true to say that the feminists underestimated the importance of economic factors. Although one important result of anti-prostitution campaigns was the realisation that women's oppression had deeper roots than

could be dealt with by legislation or equal opportunities, socialist women felt that the answer it provided was only a partial one. Most prostitutes, after all, were working class women, and the reason that they became prostitutes in the first place was usually economic. No amount of moral change, the socialists argued, could give them economic security.

To socialist women, it seemed that middle-class women could not appreciate the problem because they were financially secure; to middle-class women economic conditions were only secondary, and prostitution was a symptom of a greater social - and moral - malaise. We have already seen how the Social Democratic analysis of the world allotted socialist and feminist women's movements different and conflicting positions within it. Few women from either side attempted to bridge this gap, and one feels that feminists accepted socialist propaganda that their needs were different. The line which they generally adopted was that working-class women were oppressed only by capitalism. They were not prevented from getting jobs by the opposition of male workers, as middle-class women were. Because they also worked, they were equal to their husbands in marriage. Both were aware of the force that oppressed them - capital - and they were compelled to fight side by side to oppose it.

"The woman question is most acute in the middle classes, because there is the greatest difference in the position of the bourgeois woman in relation to a man of the same class. Among the working class equality almost exists, not according to the law but in reality. For example, among the agricultural working class a woman works in the fields and at home the same as a man, and there is no reason to believe that a woman would be less capable or less talented. The same calling brings the man and the



woman together, and so on the whole even marriage in these classes is happier than a marriage in which the man and the woman are absorbed by different interests."<sup>106</sup>

But it was partly the ideas of moral reform, the fight against prostitution, which led middle-class women to try to find a common ground between them and the Social Democrats. In an article written in 1908 Františka Plamínková agreed that the energies of working class women were completely absorbed by their own and men's struggle against capital, and that this cut them off from the perceived interests of middle-class women:

"They wage the class war even where it relates directly and especially to women, for example, in protective legislation - directly against the conventions of women's emancipation they demand the exclusion of women from certain fields of work."<sup>107</sup>

She argued, however, that women were oppressed as women in all classes, though it was not felt to the same degree in all. Working class women might not feel economic and legal oppression to the same extent as middle class women, but all women were oppressed equally in and by the family. Working class women, she said, must become conscious of themselves as women and not just as proletarians. In this way they would be able to force the Social Democratic party to a greater awareness of women's issues.

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106. Pavla Bůzková, Pokrokový názor na ženu, (Prague, 1908), p. 34.

107. Čas, 3rd May, 1908.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE BOHEMIAN WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT, 1905-1914

The women's suffrage movement was an important factor in the development of the Social Democratic and National Socialist women's movements, and influenced the emergence of 'progressive' and 'moderate' tendencies within the feminist movement. It was the largest and most successful single campaign of the pre-war feminist movement; its leaders went on to lead the movement during the First Republic. It also brought feminists face to face with political parties for the first time. Hitherto, it had been assumed that parties had assimilated the principles of women's emancipation and that they were in favour of it. Now they were asked to put their principles into practice and work for it. Feminists were drawn into political life in a way that had formerly been impossible, and often had to re-think their feminism to fit in with their developing political allegiances.

The women's suffrage movement really emerged as a response to the campaign for so-called "universal suffrage" which began in 1905.<sup>1</sup> The initiative for this campaign came from the Social Democrats, and it was originally directed towards reforming the

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1. Although the term used was "universal suffrage" (všeobecné hlasovací právo) the men who campaigned for it understood it to mean not so much universal as manhood suffrage. There was therefore an obvious contradiction between the protestations of these campaigners and the reality of their campaigns. Where "manhood suffrage" is mentioned it should therefore be remembered that the Czech phrase is "universal suffrage".

suffrage to the Bohemian Diet.<sup>2</sup> The government was attempting to bring the Diet into line with the reformed Moravian Diet<sup>3</sup> and also to add a fifth (manhood suffrage) curia to the four curiae elected on a property franchise, to correspond to the existing franchise to the Reichsrat. The Czech Social Democrats refused to accept this and continued to agitate for manhood suffrage. The campaign went on throughout the summer of 1905 and gathered momentum in the autumn. It began to lose its exclusively working class character in October and November when middle class parties started to support the demand and to participate in the huge demonstrations that took place on 10th October, 5th and 28th of November. In the last demonstration particularly there were large contingents from all political groups including, as we shall see, many feminists. As the campaign progressed and gathered speed and support it was transformed from a demand for

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2. The system of government in the non-Hungarian parts of the Monarchy established by the 1867 constitution, which in this respect made few changes to the February Patent of 1861, had two levels. The central body was the Reichsrat and the provincial ones were the Diets, with power over a comparatively large range of provincial matters, e.g. education. Both Diet and Reichsrat were elected on a curial franchise. There were four curiae: great landowners, chambers of commerce, town and country, for which electors had to be 24 and pay in taxes. In 1896 a fifth, manhood suffrage, curia had been added to the Reichsrat franchise, in which all men over 24 not otherwise represented could vote.
  3. The franchise to the Moravian Diet had been reformed along national lines in 1905. Electors now voted in nationally delimited districts for national candidates who, when in the Diet, voted in national curiae. All mandates were proportionally divided according to nationality. The compromise, however, did not extend the franchise to the lower classes, (the Diet now consisted of three curiae, Germans, Czechs and great landowners) and was opposed by all parties except the Old Czechs and the Clericals. But it did have the effect of reducing national tension in the Diet.



manhood suffrage to the Diet to one for manhood suffrage to the Reichsrat.

Women's suffrage had, of course, been discussed in feminist circles before 1905. A report on the subject was presented to the first Czech women's congress in 1897.<sup>4</sup> More recently, a meeting on women's suffrage had been called at the Czech Women's Club in June 1904 by the writer Teréza Nováková. It was a response to the demands for manhood suffrage which were already beginning to be heard, and requested that this time every effort should be made to ensure that women were not excluded from the electorate. The women who drew up the resolutions at the end of the meeting had women's suffrage first on their list of priorities, followed by universal suffrage: Politicians, they said, should fight for women's suffrage and - because it would be impossible to win it without universal suffrage - they should fight for universal suffrage as well. The meeting also demanded that women's societies should start to educate their members about the vote and submit petitions for it to legislative bodies.<sup>5</sup>

However, this awakening interest in women's suffrage was certainly not reflected in the beginnings of the manhood suffrage campaign. In the numerous declarations, exhortations and calls to action issued before October 1905 it is hard to find a mention of votes for women, although women are frequently urged to support their men in the struggle. By the beginning of October, demands for

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4. Zpráva o prvním sjezdu žen českoslovanských ve dnech 15 a 16 května 1897, (n.d.), pp. 70-74.

5. Ženský svět, (1904), VIII, 14 June.

the vote for both sexes were being made by those traditionally enlightened sections of the Czech population, teachers and students.<sup>6</sup>

On the day of the first big demonstration organised by the Social Democrats, 10th October, the women from the Czech Women's Club handed in to the Diet a petition demanding female and universal suffrage.<sup>7</sup>

But official Social Democratic utterances on the subject still took little account of women, even though they participated fully in the demonstrations of October and November. On 10th October an estimated 75-100,000 people turned out. The presence of large numbers of women, especially women from the Kladno district, was

6. cf. an article on the subject in *Učitelské noviny*, 6th October, 1905, and an announcement by Prague university students, 9th October, 1905, (AÚD KSC.1905/84.), both printed in: O. Kodědová, *Rok 1905*, (Prague, 1959), pp. 249-50 and 258.

7. The petition was accompanied by eight pages of signatures, including those of Františka Plamínková, Fraňa Zeminová, and Anna Honzáková. It ran as follows: "Remembering, in the momentous events of the present, the thousand-year struggles of our forefathers for national equality and the simultaneous fight of the working class for equality and brotherhood we, Czech women, also raise our voice today. We stand by the side of those who grasp the banner of universal, direct, equal and secret suffrage to all legislative and self-governing bodies that they may fight for it unhindered and we demand this right for women also in the name of their human dignity and all the countless important responsibilities which society has given to women.

Appealing to article 2 of the Austrian Fundamental Laws where the equality of all citizens before the law is clearly stated, we also demand passive electoral rights for women. In view of the necessary co-existence of both nations within the Czech lands we put our only hope in the universal representation of the people, which would facilitate national and social peace in the lands of the Bohemian Crown and we declare that women must not be excluded from this representation, because they are the greater half of a nation suffused with the desire to build a just democratic Czech state in which honourable people, men and women, would feel at home. Therefore we demand: The introduction of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage for men and women over 21, the conferment of passive electoral rights on women in the same measure as they are given to men." (SUA Zemský výbor 11, c 2098/1905, printed in *Rok 1905*, pp. 267-8.)

noted by the newspapers.<sup>8</sup> A deputation of Social Democratic leaders, including Karla Máchová, headed the procession and presented the demands of the crowd to the Marshal of the Diet and the Governor of Bohemia. Social Democratic and National Socialist participants were addressed by their respective leaders (Němec and Klofáč) on the importance of the demand for universal suffrage. Neither speaker mentioned women.<sup>9</sup>

By the beginning of November agitation had become widespread. There were street demonstrations and clashes with police almost every day. On 5th November a large and violent demonstration took place. About 120,000 people took part, of whom 100 were arrested, 150 were wounded and one was killed. Although women were not among these, their active participation was noted by Národní listy:

"We must point out that in the procession there were also many women, whose faces showed great enthusiasm for the workers' cause."

Women also took part in the violence. The police apparently started attacking the crowd with sabres, whereupon the demonstrators, prepared for a confrontation, immediately retaliated with bricks and cobble stones:

"Women and old people passionately incited the people on to an open fight. They carried bricks and stones from building sites themselves and gave them to the demonstrators, urging them to advance and not retreat."<sup>10</sup>

The Social Democrats then organised what was to be a massive demonstration on 28th November. Preparations for it were extensive,

8. Právo lidu, 11th October, 1905. Kladno was a mining town not far from Prague, always a Social Democratic stronghold.
9. Národní listy, 11th October, 1905.
10. Ibid., 6th November, 1905.



although the only advice given to Social Democratic women, except in Ženský list, was that men were told not to let their wives go shopping on the 28th.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the reaction of women themselves was rapidly overtaking this attitude. Social Democratic women in Plzen called a meeting attended by 4,000 women on 15th November which set up a committee to organise women's activity on the suffrage issue.<sup>12</sup> In Kladno women were particularly active. A day-long 'manifestation' of 60,000 people in late November drew 10,000 women.<sup>13</sup> This was the beginning of a movement to get women organised in the district. There were several meetings in November and December 1905 and early 1906 which attracted up to 8,000 women and led to the foundation of a branch of the 'Society of women and girls in domestic work and industry'.<sup>14</sup>

Women were becoming aware of the contradiction between their part in the agitation and the expectations of all politicians that they would support men in the fight for what was termed universal suffrage but was in fact manhood suffrage. Some time in November Fraňa Zeminová (of the National Socialists) suggested to Františka Plamínková that women should actually do something about the demand for women's suffrage. They decided to create a preparatory committee and asked Tereza Nováková, Kuklová Bezděková (from the Czech Women's Club), F. Anyžová, (from the Society of Czech Women Teachers), and

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11. Právo lidu, 26th November, 1905.

12. Ženský list, (1905), 25.

13. Právo lidu, 27th November, 1905.

14. Právo lidu, 3rd, 5th, 14th, 20th December 1905.

Karla Máchová to join it.<sup>15</sup> This committee called a public meeting on 24th November at which the progress of women's suffrage in the present campaign was discussed and criticised. Those present decided that unless women took the campaign into their own hands the attention paid to women's suffrage would continue to be negligible. Although women had participated in the agitation, their contribution and their demands had been ignored. Men could be expected to help them only as long as they themselves had no rights:

"Every man is in opposition to the government only as long as he himself does not possess this right (the suffrage): as soon as he gets it he won't have any time left for women."

Although they admitted to themselves that women were unlikely to get the vote now, they agreed that the important thing was not to be silent. The suggestions made at the meeting were:

1. that a permanent women's suffrage committee should be set up with as many parties represented on it as possible.
2. that a public meeting for women should be called for 10th December, 1905.
3. that a manifesto to the Czech people should be drawn up.
4. that all parties should be asked in writing to express their opinion on women's suffrage.
5. that pamphlets and information on the whole movement should be sent to Czech women in Moravia, Silesia and Vienna.
6. that petitions should be published and put in public places for people to sign.
7. that women should take part in the demonstration which had been called for 28th November, but: "under their own banner and for their own right to vote."<sup>16</sup>

Estimates of the number who took part in the 28th November demonstration varied from 100,000 to 200,000 but all observers were

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15. Františka Plamínková, "Český svaz pro volební právo žen" Casopis učitelek, 1913, p. 127.

16. Ženský svět, (1905), VIII.

certain that there were "uncountable numbers of women".<sup>17</sup> Even the police estimated that they formed a third of the participants.<sup>18</sup>

Social Democratic women marched with their party or trade unions, though in separate groups of women. Other women, however, had made the banner which they had been urged to do (it was red with white letters "Fight for women's right to vote") and marched together under it.<sup>19</sup> The reporter who described the scene for Čas was very impressed by the stream of women which:

"created the impression of a bright flowerbed of many coloured hats and scarves - these shimmering colours could not have made a richer or more varied garden."<sup>20</sup>

But again the speeches made said nothing about women. When the rally ended many women - some say 10,000 - marched off in disgust to the Czech Women's Club where they held an impromptu meeting in the street outside, addressed from a balcony by Plamínková and Tůmová.<sup>21</sup>

The meeting organised by the preparatory committee was held on 10th December and was attended by 3,000 women, the first really big feminist meeting in Bohemia. The reporter from Čas was there again to describe the scene; in comparison with men's meeting where "cold reason ruled", here:

17. Právo lidu, 29th November, 1905.

18. SÚA PM 1901-1910. 8/1/23/1a cj. 202321/05, reprinted in Rok 1905, p.

19. Národní listy, 29th November, 1905.

20. Čas, 29th November, 1905.

21. F. Zeminová, "Vůdčí hláva čs. feminismu", Kniha života, práce a osobnost F. Plamínkové, pp. 461-65.



"there breathed the force of enthusiasm and longing for human good; all that emotional energy which is purely female, which captures, subjugates and wins."<sup>22</sup>

The speeches expressed much the same views as those at the meeting of 24th November. Máchová for the Social Democrats emphasised the part which women had played in the recent agitation and the commitment of her party to women's suffrage. Teréza Nováková spoke for the Central Czech Women's Society and the Czech Women's Club. Attempting to justify the involvement of middle class women in the fight for the vote she used the familiar argument that, whereas working class women could fight by the side of their husbands, middle class women had a more difficult struggle because they had to fight men as well. Zeminová from the National Socialists repeated what she had said on 24th November about not relying too much on men and politicians, but she still thought that women should try to win over political parties to a recognition of women's rights. Plamínková spoke about women's general political rights in the Austrian Empire (or lack of them). She proposed to launch a campaign to repeal the 1867 law of association, and particularly paragraph 30 of it, which forbade women to join political associations. As spokeswoman for Czech teachers she also pointed to the shortcomings of women's education as the great stumbling-block in the development of their political awareness. The other speakers were Alice Masaryková, who spoke for academic women, Horáková, for women from the countryside and Čermák, a Social Democrat. The meeting concluded with two resolutions, one for women's suffrage and for a petition

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22. <sup>✓</sup>Čas, 11th December, 1905.

for this to be organised and handed in to both Reichsrat and Diet, and the other for the abolition of paragraph 30 of the law of association. It was decided to set up a women's electoral fund and to transform the temporary women's suffrage committee into a permanent one.<sup>23</sup> This was now officially named the 'Výbor pro volební právo žen' (Women's Suffrage Committee). Until 1908 it formed a separate section of the Czech Women's Club.

Although many of the original members soon dropped out because of political disagreements the internal organisation of the committee remained the same throughout its existence. Because of the constraints of paragraph 30 it always had to approximate to a 'free organisation' rather than a political organisation, and so its structure was always loose. In a document which the committee wrote in 1909 describing itself and its work it simply made two lists of members, those who came to meetings often and those who came sometimes. Branches were slowly set up in towns outside Prague, and a network of contacts was also developed. It kept up links with 'confidential auxiliaries' outside Prague, who collected signatures for petitions, reported on elections and tried to organise local suffrage committees. They had similar contacts with women in Moravia, Silesia, Galicia, Slovenia, Dalmatia and with Czechs in Vienna.<sup>24</sup>

During the first few months of 1906 the committee had a great deal to do. It had to publicise the two petitions which had been

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23. Ženský list, (1905), 26.

24. SÚA. Národní rada česká, P. 1900-1918: 78-79 "Volební Právo Žen".

agreed on at the 10th December meeting, one for women's suffrage and the other for the abolition of paragraph 30. The first got 22,000 signatures, and both were handed in to the National Socialist M.P., Václav Choc, to present to the Reichsrat in about March 1906.

The possibility of winning women's suffrage to the Reichsrat with the 1906 reform was never very great. In September 1906, in response to feminist enquiries, the government gave its final reasons for not including women in the forthcoming reform. The granting of manhood suffrage, it said, was a big enough step without going any further and including women. Moreover, women did not do military service and so had no automatic right to vote. And in any case, even where women had the vote, they did not use it.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, it was clearly important in the committee's eyes to continue the campaign for women's suffrage, if only for educational purposes, and to elicit promises of support from as many sympathetic Deputies as possible. The campaign to repeal paragraph 30 and win for women the right of association could also be conducted irrespective of the situation on the suffrage front, so that the W.S.C. always had at least two strings to its campaigning bow. The demand that paragraph 30 be repealed was a corollary to all its suffrage petitions.

It appears that, during 1907, in addition to campaigning on the question of the Reichsrat suffrage, now lost, the committee turned its attention to the Bohemian Diet, still unreformed. It had always

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25. Čas, 12th November, 1906.



been known that women had a right to vote to the Diet and that they had indeed voted in the 1860's and 1870's, but the precise laws under which they were entitled to do this and, more especially, how they were entitled to vote - whether directly or by proxy - were still not certain. It required much concentrated effort before the committee could work out exactly what the position was and before they could explain it clearly enough for all women voters to understand it and use their vote.

The Austrian system of representation had basically two layers, the Reichsrat as the central body and the Diets as the local ones. The agitation for universal suffrage and the reform which came out of it applied only to the Reichsrat. Women, with the exception of great landowners, had not been allowed to vote to the Reichsrat since 1873, and they had never had the right to be elected to it. But they did have the right to elect and be elected to the Diet. The franchise to the Bohemian Diet was based on the communal franchise, which was curial (as the Reichsrat franchise had been till 1907). There were four curiae, consisting of great landowners, chambers of commerce, town and country electors. Anyone who was entitled to vote in communal elections was also entitled to vote to the Diet, but women could vote in commune elections only through a male proxy, which caused great confusion as to whether they could vote directly to the Diet or not.

To be eligible to vote, electors had to be 24 and pay 8 zl in taxes. Certain professions, teachers, for example, had an 'honorary right' to vote. Women were not mentioned explicitly in the electoral law, but neither were they expressly excluded, as they

were in the Reichsrat electoral law.<sup>26</sup> The original 1861 electoral law laid down that all votes should be cast directly. In 1864 it was decreed that women could now exercise their voting rights only according to the conditions laid down for commune elections i.e. voting by proxy. This was because the communal vote was then considered to be the legal basis of the Diet vote, and in any case proxy voting by women was by now enshrined in practice. A court decision of 1897, however, decided that proxy votes were not, in general, valid.<sup>27</sup> Taxpayers over 30 who possessed the communal franchise also had the right to be elected. This situation applied all over Bohemia, except in Prague and Liberec where women were specifically excluded from the communal franchise and thus had no rights at all.

The position, therefore, was very complicated. Although the committee's arguments stood up in law the most conservative political parties, the Clericals and the Old Czechs refused to be convinced. And when a woman was elected the Governor of Bohemia refused to recognise her mandate on the grounds that it was nowhere positively stated that women were entitled to be elected. Moreover, the whole question of proxy voting vs. direct voting was still open to dispute. Every election in every constituency was supervised by a vote commission, which had it in its power to reject

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26. The only women to be mentioned were women great landowners; it was stated that they must cast their votes through a male proxy.

27. A commission to decide the validity of an election (that of Wunderlich in České Budějovice), where someone won by means of proxy votes decided that these were valid only for great landowners. (B. Franta, in Ženský svět, (1913), p. 303.)

any votes which it thought, according to its view of the law, had been incorrectly cast. Thus it could in practice disallow votes cast by women, whether directly or by proxy.

Its study of the Diet franchise had provided the W.S.C. with a weapon against the antifeminism of the government. If at elections or by-elections they could put up a woman candidate and get her elected to the Diet - in part, by women voters - this would make nonsense of women's lack of voting rights to the Reichsrat. They must also have anticipated that the government would very soon seek to reform the Diet: after all, it had attempted to do so in 1905, only to be overtaken by the universal suffrage agitation. The election of a woman would make it difficult to do away with women's suffrage altogether in this process.

The committee therefore had two distinct tasks, connected in their expected impact but quite separate in the kind of organisation they required. One was to get a woman elected to the Diet, the other was to get women's suffrage, as a part of universal suffrage, included in any future revision of the Diet electoral law. Although their ultimate aim was universal suffrage, they had few illusions that it could be achieved in the near future: at the moment they thought it was necessary to defend the rights of those women who could vote. Thus, they were often seen as trying to fight a rear-guard action for women of independent means, while ignoring the rights of ordinary people. It was easy to make this confusion, and the W.S.C. itself was often not very explicit about what it wanted to achieve. The basis of the campaign was that propertied women already had the right to vote and to be elected. Under the



proposed electoral reform, put forward by the government in 1908 they would retain their right to vote, and women in Prague and Liberec would even gain this right, but they would lose the right to be elected. They would also be excluded from the franchise to the new manhood suffrage curia which the government proposed to add on to the other four.

Thus, in concentrating its campaigns on the right of women to be elected it could be seen as ignoring the far more important issue of universal suffrage. Obviously women could not achieve complete equality until there was complete universal suffrage, but in the meantime the W.S.C. thought that they should fight to retain what rights they had, particularly the passive right. If a woman could be elected under the existing suffrage, this would make a mockery of the new proposals. Hopefully, it would then lead to a reappraisal of these proposals in favour of women. At best this might lead to a really universal suffrage law in the Diet (and by implication in the Reichsrat). At worst it might mean that women retained their passive right and were included in the fifth curia on the same terms as men.

The immediate struggle, however, was conducted within the framework of the property franchise, and several groups of women - the Social Democrats, and women in political parties like the Progressives, for instance - felt that too much emphasis was put on the present and not enough on the future. The property franchise was elevated into a principle which could never appeal to the majority of financially dependent, non-taxpaying women. This was one of the reasons why these groups gradually left the committee.

Another of the Committee's campaigns was directed against the restrictive communal franchise in Prague, whereby women living there had no rights at all. Even in the proposed reform of the Diet electoral law, although women from Prague and Liberec would be given the vote to the Diet, they would still have no right to vote in the communal elections, or to stand for election to any body, and there could be no provision for this to be altered. The only proposal put forward for communal suffrage reform in Prague merely extended to women in Prague the rights which women elsewhere had always had, while not giving them the same right to be elected. The W.S.C. opposed this as being no advance on the existing state of affairs.<sup>28</sup> Campaigning within the city of Prague was given added impetus by its growth in the years before the war. Many suburban districts previously outside the city boundaries were now being incorporated into it and the women in them were losing their voting rights.<sup>29</sup>

#### Election campaigns

Putting up a woman for election to the Diet was not the line of action initially envisaged by the W.S.C. They had wanted to encourage political parties to put up a woman candidate, rather than take on the responsibilities of a party themselves. Elections to the Diet were due to take place in March 1908, and so it was imperative

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28. ANM. PhDr. Albina Honzáková, Výbor pro volební právo žen: protokoly. Protocol of 29th April, 1909.

29. Právo ženy (1911), I, number 4.

that a line of action be agreed on. When this approach to individual political parties failed, the committee then asked if all the parties could agree between themselves to nominate a woman candidate in one constituency. This was also unsuccessful. The Social Democrats agreed to put up Máchová as their candidate in the Holešovice district of Prague. She was eligible to stand for election because she possessed the franchise in another area. Her candidature, however, could only be a gesture, since no women could vote for her. The W.S.C. agreed to support her, as did the Progressive party. The Progressives had already told the committee that they would support a woman candidate, if the committee would find a suitable contender and a suitable constituency.<sup>30</sup>

The W.S.C. eventually selected one of its members, Marie Tůmová<sup>31\*</sup> and she stood in the constituency of Výšoké Mýto in East Bohemia.<sup>32</sup> Lack of party support forced Tůmová to stand as an 'independent women's candidate' on a special 'women's programme' which did not confine itself to demanding the suffrage but reflected the whole range of feminist concerns, especially the view that women's suffrage was a tool of social and moral reform. Its declared aims were:

30. ANM Honzáková. Protocol of... 14th November, 1907.

31. The obvious choice was Plamínková, but she refused, saying that she wanted enough time to devote to the campaign itself.

\* For a biographical note, see Appendix 1.

32. The State Rights Radicals and the National Socialists also put up a woman candidate - a teacher named Zelínková - in Kutná Hora. Some sources (Výbor protocols) say that she failed to stand; others (Ženský list) that the parties' campaign on her behalf was so feeble that she received only three votes.



- "1. to secure equal legal rights for women, the same as men possess.
2. Equal universal suffrage, direct and secret ballot for both men and women.
3. Just representation of both nationalities, based on population.
4. The assurance of individual freedom for the nation, as well as for the individual, on the basis of equal rights and equal freedom.
5. Universal education and culture.
6. Reforms in the care of children.
7. Reforms in the care of the poor and the insane.
8. The readjustment of the economic conditions of the country."<sup>33</sup>

Some of Tůmová's supporters feared that the women's programme confused or estranged potential supporters and therefore lost her votes,<sup>34</sup> but although she was not elected, the W.S.C. was pleased with the result. (She won 13% of the vote, compared with Máchová's 20% in Prague.) She had been opposed by many vested interests within the constituency. Her opponent had been the mayor of Výsoké Mýto on whom depended the existence of a girls' industrial school which the women of the town had founded. Those who campaigned for her continually found unexplained difficulties put in their way:

"It was impossible for women to get anything printed outside working hours, but posters accusing women of deviousness and deception were printed for men throughout the night. Notices were posted all over the town from the early hours of the morning, whereas for women this was forbidden without the permission of the council and there were no workmen to do it."<sup>35</sup>

So the women who voted for Tůmová needed to be brave, and the number who did, under the circumstances, was quite large. One effect of

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33. The programme was published in Ženský svět (1908), number 3. I have used an English version, probably prepared by Tůmová, which appears in the report of the 1909 congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, under 'Bohemia'.
  34. Čas, 28th February, 1908.
  35. Ibid., 8th March, 1908.

the election was to increase people's awareness of the whole issue of votes for women, and the W.S.C. reported proudly that progressive men and women in the area had formed themselves into a 'union for the intellectual elevation of the people'.<sup>36</sup>

In September 1908 the government put forward its proposal for reform of the Diet electoral statutes. At the end of the year the candidate who had been elected at Výsoké Mýto gave up his seat, so that Tumorová had another chance. The W.S.C., now actually threatened with change, had to start all over again, trying to come to an arrangement with the political parties.

It tried to do this first through the Czech National Council in order to give the whole issue the status of a nationalist enterprise, but the Council could not work without the consent of all seven major parties, and since this was not forthcoming the committee had to negotiate with each party separately.<sup>37</sup> Some agreements were reached, but they were so hedged in with conditions as to be virtually useless. For example, the National Socialists promised that they would not put up their own candidate to oppose Tumorová if the Young Czechs also abstained. They further stipulated that she must join their parliamentary club if elected, and if her

36. SÚA. Národní rada česká, P: 1900-1918. 78-79. "The work of the women's suffrage committee 1908-9" (English original).

37. The Czech National Council (Národní rada česká) had been set up in 1900 on the initiative of the Young Czech Party, but it only became active in June, 1906. Its aim was to achieve united action by all parties on questions common to the Czech nation. It took action only on issues which were "joint efforts" of the whole nation and of all the parties represented in it (all parties except the Social Democrats). Ottův naučný slovník, Národní rada česká, XXVII, p. 1186.

election was not confirmed by the Governor she must give up her seat. In return, they said that they would treat her candidature as one of their own party's, and would use the party organisation to agitate for her and collect signatures to the W.S.C.'s petition.<sup>38</sup>

The State Rights party gave her their support under the same conditions as the National Socialists.<sup>39</sup> Young Czech women wanted

her to join their club (not the parliamentary club) if she was elected.<sup>40</sup> The Social Democrats agreed not to put up a candidate

and to agitate for Tůmová if she stood as an independent and if all other parties refrained from putting up a candidate under the same conditions.<sup>41</sup> And lastly, the Progressives agreed not to

put a candidate but objected to Tůmová's alleged clericalism and anti-semitism.<sup>42</sup> Most of the conditions laid down by the parties

were, as can be seen, mutually exclusive. Eventually, of course,

Young Czechs, National Socialists and Social Democrats all put up candidates, each saying that the other parties had broken their

agreement first and forced it unwillingly to put up a candidate

itself. But the results were an improvement on Tůmová's last election.

This time she got 18% of the votes in the second ballot, when the

Social Democrats dropped out and transferred their share of the votes

to her, but the contest was still won decisively by the National

Socialists.<sup>43</sup> There were three other attempts by parties to put up

38. This was a new petition, started in September, 1908, when the news of the Government proposal to reform the Diet became known.

39. ANM Honzáková. Protocol of 28th January, 1909.

40. Ibid., 3rd February, 1909.

41. Ibid., 13th January and 17th February, 1909.

42. Ibid., 20th January, 1909.

43. SÚA. Národní rada česká, P: 1900-1918. 78-79.



a woman candidate in by-elections in 1909 but none were successful. One woman was put up by the Agrarian party in Bydžov, and another woman stood in the Prague district of Holešovice.<sup>44</sup> Then in the last half of 1909 the W.S.C. made another attempt to put up a woman in this district. Since this was Prague, there was little point in putting up a 'women's candidate', since no women would be able to vote for her. Women who had the vote in other parts of Bohemia were, however, eligible to stand for election in Prague (as Máchová had done in 1908), and so the committee concentrated on getting parties to agree to put up a woman or to support another party's woman candidate. State Rights Radicals, National Socialists, Social Democrats and Progressives all agreed to do this. It all depended on the Young Czechs who had held the seat up to now. Most of them had apparently been won over to the idea, but the local party organisation decided on a man, as the only sex appropriate to represent an industrial district such as Holešovice.<sup>45</sup>

There is no record of women standing for election to the Diet in 1910 and 1911, though it may be that the W.S.C. put up some more unsuccessful candidates in by-elections. In any case, their policy was finally vindicated in 1912, when Božena Víková Kunětická was elected for the constituency of Mladá Boleslav.

Before the election the committee once more appealed to the Czech National Council to negotiate with political parties on its behalf, and the same lack of unanimity once again prevented the

44. ANM Honzáková. Protocol of 29th April, 1909.

45. Zenský obzor (1909-10), IX, number 1. Jus Suffragii, October 1909.

Council from taking any co-ordinating action. So the committee was left to negotiate on its own again. Mladá Boleslav had hitherto been a Young Czech seat, so the election of a woman depended on their agreeing to support her. They said that they would put up a woman as long as all the other parties agreed to support her. The woman they chose was Božena Víková Kunětická, the head of their party women's organisation, who was understandably not a popular choice with the Social Democrats and the Progressives. But nevertheless, at the outset all sides agreed to support her as long as there were no other candidates. The National Socialists were the party from whom the most difficulty had been anticipated, but their attitude towards all party women candidates had mellowed since 1909. Now they were willing to support a woman candidate as long as she was a feminist.<sup>46</sup>

However, complications developed when the local Young Czech organisation refused to accept a woman candidate. The mayor of Mladá Boleslav, who had been hoping to be nominated Young Czech candidate now entered the field as an independent. So at this the Social Democrats decided to put up their own woman candidate, Karla Máchová. The State Rights Radicals instructed their supporters to vote for either woman candidate; the Progressives supported Máchová. Víková Kunětická won the first election, and so the Social Democrats and Progressives transferred all their votes to her. The independent candidate gave up at this point, and Víková Kunětická was elected unanimously.<sup>47</sup>

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46. Ženské snahy (1912), V, number 10.

47. Ženský obzor, (1912-13), XII, number 6.

But her problems were not yet over. No deputy could sit in the Diet until he or she had obtained a 'representative's certificate' from the Governor. This certificate was nothing to do with the validity of the election, but Víková Kunětická was refused one on the grounds that the election of a woman was not valid. The Diet never sat in the period between her election and June 1913, and the dispute about her right to sit there was still going on when it was closed for the last time. She was not able to represent her electors until she sat in the National Assembly in 1918.

#### The Women's Suffrage Committee and the Bohemian Diet

Both its short-term aim of getting a woman elected to the Diet and its long-term declared intention of winning universal suffrage to it connected the activity of the W.S.C. closely to the proceedings of the Bohemian Diet. In addition the Diet had a certain symbolism for them. They saw it as the battleground of nationalities in Bohemia, an arena where their particular view of Czech nationalism could be expressed. The demand for women's suffrage was for them an intrinsic part of any Czech national democratic programme, and thus the Czechs, who supported it, were good, and the Germans, who did not, bad in the W.S.C.'s eyes. Between these two extremes they ignored the realities of political negotiation and compromise.

But in reality the relationship of the Diet to the government in Vienna and the political parties in Bohemia was not so simple. Czechs and Germans may have been fighting it out in the Diet, but the point at issue was not their relative commitment to democracy,



expressed in their support of votes for women, rather, each side wished to institutionalise its own national 'territory' and save it from the encroachment of the other. The demand for universal (and thus for female) suffrage was merely a weapon in this struggle.

The power of the Bohemian Diet vis-a-vis the Reichsrat was limited and fundamentally local. It could pass no legislation which did not have to be subsequently approved by the Reichsrat; the governor of Bohemia was not responsible to it. Its main sphere of competence was in the provincial administration, providing and paying for services like the police, schools and hospitals. As an institution it was thoroughly unrepresentative, being elected on a property franchise. Since the Reichsrat reform of 1907, the Diet was now the only place where the great landowners still had substantial power.

The Austrian government had been proposing to reform the Bohemian Diet since 1905. Their aim in so doing was to provide the administrative preconditions for a truce to be called between the two sides and to facilitate the conduct of ordinary administration without any nationalist interference. They were hoping to follow the example of the Moravian Compromise, introduced in that year, whereby voters voted in nationally defined districts for national candidates, who then, in the Diet, voted in national curiae. Czechs and Germans, however, had other ideas about the place within the administration which they wished to reserve for themselves. The minimum demands of the Czechs were expressed in the demand for historic rights. They wanted to increase the power of the Diet and, for example, to make the Governor responsible to it; and to introduce

universal suffrage, which would ensure that they had a numerical majority within it. The Germans, however, wanted no part in this historic unity; they wanted guarantees of their own national autonomy within Bohemia, and as close a relationship to Vienna as to Prague. For the Government to approach its goal, therefore, it needed to bring both sides towards some kind of compromise. This attempt at compromise formed the substance of the negotiations over the Diet from 1908-1913, to which the W.S.C. was a witness.

When the Diet met in September 1908 the government put before it a proposal for constitutional and electoral reform which was much the same as its previous proposal of 1905. The only substantial change which is worth our noting is that women's suffrage rights had not been completely done away with. They had the same rights as before, except that the right to be elected was now expressly denied them. Between 1908 and 1913 the Diet never met for long enough - and was never sufficiently free from obstruction - to discuss this measure. In theory, every new Diet session meant that it could be passed and that women's rights were in constant danger of erosion, but in practice it was only one part of a package of proposals designed to bring about an administrative compromise. Negotiations about these measures continued intermittently outside the Diet, in private, or in the Reichsrat for the next five years.

A considerable area of agreement was outlined in these discussions by the two sides: for example, by 1910 the Germans were prepared to recognise the administrative and legislative unity of Bohemia in return for considerable Czech concessions to their demands



for national administrative autonomy.<sup>48</sup> One of the demands which both sides decided to shelve in these agreements was the demand for universal suffrage, which only the Young Czechs and parties to the left of them on the Czech side had supported unconditionally.

(The Agrarians and Old Czechs were prepared to compromise on it; the Germans and the government were opposed.) Thus the addition of a fifth manhood suffrage curia was in effect agreed on, even though all parties concerned realised that this was not a very progressive step.<sup>49</sup> But despite this agreement it was impossible to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion. It seemed to be necessary for at least one side to be seen to make a substantial concession to the other, which, in the face of radical nationalist opinion in both camps, neither was prepared to do. Between 1911 and 1913 the negotiations stuck on further points, such as the use of Czech as the language of inner service, and financial provision for minority schools. In any case, the 1911 session of the Diet was soon closed because of the usual German obstruction, and in 1912 it was not even called.

By 1913 the financial situation had reached a crisis point. It will be remembered that the Diet controlled provincial finances. If it did not meet and agree the yearly budget, allocations were not made, employees were not paid, and so forth. Since 1908 a makeshift solution had been arrived at by borrowing money from

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48. These were agreed in the subcommittees of the National Political Committee of the Diet, which were set up as a result of discussions between the two sides in 1910.

49. Tobolka, Zd. Politické dějiny národa českého, (Prague, 1932-37), III/2, pp. 545-6.



the central government, but after the summer of 1913 no more money would be forthcoming. It had long been the hope of the Germans in this dispute that financial difficulties would force the Czechs to cave in - in their approach to negotiations in 1910 and 1911 they had indeed used the need to vote new taxes as a bargaining counter. But when the financial crisis was resolved it was not because either side had conceded; instead, the government stepped in, dissolved the Diet and set up an administrative council to run Bohemia on 26th June 1913.

Seen in this context, the hopes of the W.S.C. that woman suffrage could be achieved look rather idealistic. Certainly their ideas were completely in accord with the aims of Czech politicians. Women's suffrage was a natural corollary of the Czech demand for universal suffrage, which combined democratic feeling with the wish to be in the majority in the Diet. At the 1908 session of the Diet, when the government presented the proposal outlined above, Czech delegates put forward three suggestions for the reform of the electoral law, two of them based on universal suffrage.<sup>50</sup> These also remained technically before the Diet in the same way as the government proposal, never to be decided on.

We have seen that the 1908 session closed without anything being discussed, let alone decided. But from this point, despite

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50. A Young Czech (Koerner) suggested a Diet based on universal suffrage, (including women), with 240 members and proportional representation for the nationalities. Baxa, for the State Rights Radicals, had a similar proposal; his Diet would have 300 members. (Tobolka, Politické dějiny národa českého III/2 pp. 501-6.)

the obvious unworkability of the Diet and the impasse reached in negotiations the W.S.C.'s perception of the situation seems to diverge increasingly from reality. They were under the impression that the government proposal might be passed at any time while the Diet was in session. But in fact this was hardly likely; furthermore, in the course of Diet negotiations it became clear that universal suffrage was a demand which could be compromised on in order to facilitate an administrative reorganisation of Bohemia.

It may be because most of these negotiations took place behind the scenes that the committee was so ill-informed; in any case, the final decision of the National Political Committee of the Diet in March 1912 against women's suffrage seems to have shocked them considerably. They wrote to the government, put pressure on the Czech members of the Reichsrat and Czech ministers at Vienna. They also issued a 'proclamation to the Czech nation' in all the daily papers and on posters, sent deputations of women to all Czech members of the committee and asked German women to do the same for German members. The response to all this agitation seems to have been encouraging, with support coming in from men's and women's organisations all over Bohemia and Moravia. German women co-operated fully.<sup>51</sup> A second report published by the committee a year later was equally discouraging; it voted by a large majority against women being eligible to the Diet. Since the committee was composed of three Germans, three Czechs and three great landowners, the Czechs could be outvoted by the other two groups. The women's only hope

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51. I.W.S.A. conference report, London, 1913.



lay in the fact that the Diet alone had the right to vote on the law, and since it never sat again the law could never be changed.

After the constitution had finally been suspended and the Diet replaced by an administrative commission the W.S.C. protested vociferously, as much against this example of Austrian autocracy as against the threat to women's rights which it represented. At a meeting in November 1913 it resolved to demand new elections to the Diet at once, in which elections parties would be asked to put up women candidates. The task of the Diet would then be to work out a new electoral law, and revise the communal suffrage law on the basis of equality between men and women.<sup>52</sup>

The methods and composition of the Women's Suffrage Committee, and its place in the Czech feminist movement

Although the main practical focus of the committee's activities was the election of a woman to the Diet, it was engaged in a surprising number of other activities as well, directly or indirectly related to the suffrage.<sup>53</sup> The publicising of their cause was very important. They collected signatures to numerous petitions to the Diet and the Reichsrat, both for women's suffrage and the abolition of paragraph 30. There were also two deputations to the Reichsrat.<sup>54</sup> Petitions were

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52. Jus Suffragii, December, 1913.

53. The campaign for the abolition of paragraph 30 was one of these. The W.S.C. also took the side of women members of Sokol who were complaining about discrimination against them in the organisation.

54. In 1911 representatives of the W.S.C., and women from Moravia and Vienna formed a deputation. Masaryk met them in Vienna and took them to see Gautsch. (Ženská revue, (1911), VII, July.)



sent out to women's societies and contacts all over Bohemia and put in shops so that women could sign them. The committee liked to use political parties to circulate petitions whenever it could; they sometimes managed to persuade the Progressives or National Socialists to co-operate, but only as a great favour.<sup>55</sup>

There were many other ways of making themselves known. A lot of publicity was done through public meetings, especially ones where members of all political parties were invited to come and reveal their opinions on women's suffrage. The basic technique was to write to deputies and ask them three questions:

1. What does your party think of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage for women?
2. Are you sincerely prepared to work for its realisation, get it recognised among your political friends, support petitions about it?
3. Do you agree that paragraph 30 should be abolished?<sup>56</sup>

This approach was popular with suffragists the world over. However, in practice the parties who were unfavourable did not come and usually did not express their views in any form, leaving the parties who acknowledged themselves as supporters of woman suffrage - usually Social Democrats and National Socialists - to fight it out between

55. There seem to have been at least five petitions presented by the W.S.C. to the Reichsrat of the Diet. One with 22,000 signatures was presented to the Reichsrat by Václav Choc in March, 1906. It demanded the vote and the abolition of paragraph 30. A similar petition was prepared for the Diet at about the same time, but I can find no record of when it was handed in, or of how many people signed it. One with about 24,000 signatures was handed in a year later, in spring 1907. A petition was presented to the Diet in September, 1908, and another, with about 24,000 signatures, was presented in May, 1909. A further petition was presented to the Reichsrat in September, 1911. In addition, German Bohemian women also prepared at least one petition, which they handed in to the Diet in 1910.

56. ANM Honzáková, Protocol of 8th April, 1907.

them in an acrimonious debate about which was the most sincere.

Information about their attitudes to votes for women was gathered not only from delegates to the Reichsrat and the Diet, but also from those standing in municipal elections in Prague - since the committee was Prague-based, it tended to concentrate on Prague issues. Here the committee used the information in a slightly different way, printing posters with the names of all candidates and what their attitudes were, so that people could vote for those who had the right views. Meetings were being held constantly, either in connection with an imminent election or by-election, or to do with proposed reforms to the Diet and communal suffrage. The committee used to organise campaigns on the subject of the Diet, usually one or two a year.

In the campaign of autumn 1908, for example, they hoped to organise about twenty meetings all over Bohemia and one in every Prague suburb.<sup>57</sup> The plan for the campaign of March and April 1909, after Tůmová's unsuccessful candidature, stressed two important points. The campaign had to draw attention to the indisputable legal basis on which women's claims rested, and remind political parties that they also had a responsibility for the political education of women. The Prague part of the campaign consisted of a large public meeting (about 4,000 people) to which candidates for the suburbs and those for the inner city of Prague were invited. Many of these also spoke and signatures were collected for the current petition. The usual questionnaires were sent to all deputies,

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57. Ibid., Protocol of 14th October, 1908.



and the results were then published; only two of the 73 who answered did not support women's suffrage. Circulars were also sent round to as many women as possible, asking them to take part in the campaign.

At the time of every election there was additional publicity about women's right to vote, how they should vote and for whom.<sup>58</sup> In a constituency where a woman candidate was standing they wrote to all the women electors in the district, urging them to vote for her. As many members of the committee who could spent the weeks before the election in the constituency, helping to publicise the cause, awaken the interest of local women, and, if possible, enlist their help.

The W.S.C. also advertised itself at these times, and at times when there was nothing much going on by putting advertisements in provincial newspapers and inviting women and groups to write to the committee and ask for speakers. It organised a great deal of educational activity in Prague; in the winter 1910-11 it arranged a series of lectures on Czech political history, seven lectures on Czech political parties and four evenings of debates on votes for women.<sup>59</sup>

58. Before the Diet elections of 1908, for example, they issued detailed instructions on what women should do: what to do if you did not receive a voter's card, how to get a woman on to the vote commission. They also supplied the legal references on which women on these commissions could base their arguments that women should be allowed to vote in person. (Čas, 19th February, 1908.)

59. Zenský obzor, (1910-11), X, numbers 6-8. The subjects dealt with in the debating evenings were:  
 1. The meaning of women's suffrage and the arguments against it.  
 2. The political rights of women in other countries.  
 3. Women's role in Czech political parties. (Jus Suffragii, September, 1910.)



One of the chief problems which the committee faced arose because of its composition and organisation. Since it was so closely involved in politics and was taking up in many cases the position of a political party, should it remain an independent body of women, loosely organised, or become a more formal organisation, with women delegated to it from political parties? Organisationally, there were strong pressures against it losing its loose structure. It was a free circle, with no officers, no official membership and no subscriptions. There was thus little opportunity for the police to attack it for being a women's political organisation.

Fear of being closed down by the police was not just paranoia on the committee's part. The Austrian women's suffrage committee, formed at the same time, was now restricted to petitions for the abolition of paragraph 30.<sup>60</sup> Prominent members of the W.S.C. were frequently subject to police searches. If an official membership were established, which was what would happen if women were delegated from political parties, police harassment would become that much more likely. However, it must be said that the police seem to have turned an intentionally blind eye to the committee's activities, which would easily have qualified as 'political' in any sense of the word. If they had been determined to close it down, they could soon have found an excuse. Thus the arguments for reorganisation on a delegate basis carry more weight.

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60. Ženská revue, (1906-7), 11, March, 1907. It had asked permission to turn itself into a permanent organisation, but this had been refused, Ernestine Firth, "Geschichte der Frauenstimmrechtsbewegung" in Frauenbewegung, Frauenbildung und Frauenarbeit in Österreich, ed. Martha Braun, Vienna, 1936, pp. 65-84.

Reorganisation was seen as important not only because political parties needed to be represented, but also because having a prescribed delegate membership would mean that the domination of the committee by 'non-political' feminists would be reduced. At the start, women of all political opinions were represented on the committee, but this did not last for long, Karla Machova seems to have continued to attend occasional meetings until the end of 1907, but Social Democracy had begun to disassociate itself publicly from women's suffrage in 1906, and it is probable that her intensive co-operation with the committee had come to an end by the autumn of that year. The National Socialists also left officially during 1906, though friendly relations were also maintained. The Central Czech Women's Society withdrew from the W.S.C. and the Czech Women's Club because of the quarrel over the 1908 women's conference.<sup>61</sup> Thus, both 'extreme' wings had ceased to participate, although they continued to support the committee on important occasions like elections. Dissent over organisation did not only come from a party like the Social Democrats, which did not agree with independent feminism, but from women in other parties as well. The suffrage agitation had stimulated women to involve themselves in politics on a much larger scale than before, and women who had joined the National Socialist and Progressive parties especially showed dissatisfaction with the way the committee was run.

But in fact, only a minority of the W.S.C.'s members was attached to any political party. Most of the women in it conformed

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61. F. Zeminová, "Vůdčí hláva čs. feminismu", in: Kniha života, práce a osobnost F. Plamínkové, pp. 461-5.



to a definite pattern. They were single women in their thirties, well educated and employed. The majority of them were teachers, some clerks and doctors. A few of the members were married with children, but they were not the most active. There was thus a stereotype of the 'Czech suffragette' which women who did not conform to it tended to resent.

The most outstanding woman on the committee, who certainly helped to contribute towards this stereotype, was Františka Plamínková. Although she always insisted that all members of the committee were equal, it is clear that hers was one of the personalities which dominated it. She was a very good speaker, taking on a large number of the committee's speaking engagements and was thus, inevitably, seen as a spokeswoman for its activities. Marie Tůmová was in a similar position: as the committee's candidate and a frequent speaker on its behalf she could not help but become publicly identified with it. Laura Schmidtová, a member of the Czech Women's Club, who moved over to work on the committee when it was founded described how it operated:

"Plamínková became our mother, Tůmová our father, we very obedient children and we set to work."<sup>62</sup>

Other long term members of the committee who attended meetings constantly had a similar background, for example, Anna Schöntagová, and Albina Honzáková.\*

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62. Laura Schmidtová, "Život ve starém Volebním výboru", in *ibid.*, p. 232.

\* For biographical notes, see Appendix I.



From 1908 to 1914 the W.S.C. went through a series of conflicts about what its composition should be, whether it was capable of running the suffrage movement on its own, or whether a bigger organisation was needed. Basically, the committee saw itself as a group of people without any collective allegiance to a party, although its individual members might be involved in parties. At the same time it expected to command the support of all Czech political parties (except the clericals and the Old Czechs) on women's suffrage issues. For all parties were theoretically in favour of women's suffrage; the W.S.C. enjoyed a far greater degree of institutionalised political support than did its sister organisations in other countries. The opposition to women's suffrage was seen as primarily German and so the committee's tactical assumption was that it would only have to direct the energies of the democratic, suffragist Czech parties into the proper channels, i.e. selecting a woman candidate.

The composition of the W.S.C. often came under attack during the period for not being representative of these political parties, for trying to act above or beside parties but not with them. They were accused of being 'feminist' and not 'political'; of not having a comprehensive programme or the power to put one into practice. These criticisms were first articulated from within the committee at the end of 1908. Olga Stranska, the leading woman in the Progressive party, suggested that the central committee of each party should be asked to include some of its women members on the W.S.C. These women would then become proper members of the committee.<sup>63</sup>

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63. ANM Honzáková: Protocol of 11th November, 1908.

A similar plan was acted on with the crucial difference that these parties were not asked to include women on their central committees as well. Instead, a woman from each party was chosen and written to; the letter said that the committee would inform them of its plans and asked them to work for the success of any of its campaigns within their parties. They were not expected to come to regular meetings. All seemed willing to participate. Some members of the committee had their doubts about such a plan from the start. Tůmová pointed out that there had formerly been party women on the W.S.C. but that their parties had forbidden them to participate and they had dropped out. Her pessimism seems to have been justified, because there is no further record of these chosen women being of any help at all.<sup>64</sup> And of course there was the problem that if the women with whom they had contact were not on the party central committee but just in the women's section they would have no power to influence policy.

Despite the failure of this plan, the attack on the composition of the committee was renewed in early 1909. Again it was led by Olga Stranská, but by now she had left the committee because she disagreed with their politics - she had become convinced that they were more interested in retaining the property franchise than fighting for universal suffrage. The argument started in an article in the Progressive daily Čas, and was pursued in a series of articles and meetings during the first half of 1909. What prompted it, ostensibly, was Tůmová's second election campaign at Výšoké Mýto. Stranská thought that the committee's election tactics on this occasion, trying, as before, to make it into an all-party candidature, were mistaken

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64. Ibid., Protocol of 18th November, 1908.



because they were outdated. In 1908, few parties had supported the idea of a woman candidate and it was natural that the committee should seek whatever support it could. Now, however, thought Stranská, the idea was much more widely accepted and it was time for the committee to come to terms with this and reorganise itself. The W.S.C. had always justified itself by saying that woman suffrage should be an all-party demand; it should stand outside parties to try to mobilise party support. Stranská agreed that women's suffrage should not become a political football, but thought that the whole idea of the struggle being led by a group of non-aligned women who could thus claim to be outside party influence was ridiculous:

"If I lead a struggle, I stand between the parties, I myself create a party and so I do not stand above parties.. It would be clear and irrefutable if they said, 'Our demand must stand above parties, but all those parties who have recognised it and taken women into their organisations must work for it. Then let these women join together in the W.S.C.' This would be an all-women candidature and not the candidature of a group of women... with whom women can agree because they put forward a common idea at the important moment, whom progressive people and parties can accept when they make allowances for the situation, and the importance of the idea, but whose activity is always a stumbling block in the way to full agreement."<sup>65</sup>

The 'women's programme' which Tůmová had campaigned on was also a hindrance to agreement. Rather than limiting herself to the point at issue, suffrage, it tried to cover the whole area of potential feminine influence on politics, thus lending more weight to the accusations that the W.S.C. was in fact setting itself up as a party. If it was becoming a women's party it should try to be a bit more representative of women who were active in politics.

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65. Ženský obzor, (1908-9), VIII, number 3.



The way the committee defended itself against these attacks shows that its position was confused. They acknowledged that an independent women's candidature was simply a product of the present situation and could never be a principle for the future. They agreed that it would be far better if parties were to put up their own women candidates, but argued that at that point, when (they assumed) women's voting rights were liable to be swept away at any moment it was important to get a woman elected, of whatever party. Getting parties to put up their own women candidates was in fact quite a different thing from a joint candidature because it put politics first and women's interests second: it acknowledged that women could have political interests which were at variance with feminism. However, the whole issue of a joint candidature and the practical work which the campaign involved effectively put off any decisions about women's political activity and possible political allegiance. "The candidature of a woman", said the W.S.C., "has primarily a moral significance."<sup>66</sup> The politics of it were considered to be unimportant, compared to the future political and cultural significance of the loss of women's rights which acceptance of the government proposals before the Diet would entail.

So the whole question of the part which women could play in politics, of how far women's demands and the demands of political parties were in fact compatible was shelved. The committee had got no further than the early feminists did, arguing about whether women actually deserved any rights at all, backing up their arguments by references to women's achievements. The goals it set in its women's

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66. Ibid.

programme were equally circumscribed by traditional feminine concerns and national aspirations. This was not the committee's intention, but rather a result of its policy: however, it cannot but have alienated those who were trying to reach a *modus vivendi* between feminism and politics. The criticism introduced by this debate became a continuing factor. The W.S.C.'s failure to reform itself in order to correspond to the demands of the Progressives and National Socialists led eventually to the Progressives' formally abandoning support for it, for example, in the 1912 election campaign.

Organisation was always a preoccupation of the Czech women's movement. The attempts made to unify Czech women's societies bring them all together in a Council, Association or Union between 1909 and 1914 have been described. Feminists felt that they were not being as effective as they might be, that combination might bring the strength they needed, and so for many years they persevered with plans to group the many small societies that existed under one umbrella, without success. Part of this problem, of course, was political - both the ban on political association for women and the growing political and therefore tactical differences between groups. In the context, therefore, of this desire for unification, which was never strong enough to overcome the obstacles which hindered its progress the W.S.C. must have stood out as the only small organisation which could actually achieve something, even despite political differences. This position was reinforced by the election of Víková Kunětická in 1912. It was natural that the W.S.C.'s growing influence and international prestige should lead to new attempts to reorganise it and make it responsive to the interests



of women organised in political parties and women's societies. But the latest plans for this were more ambitious than previous ones - the intention now was not merely to restructure the committee but to unify the Czech women's suffrage movement in Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Lower Austria.

In most countries the women's suffrage movements were already organised into suffrage unions or associations; this had not happened in Austria and Bohemia simply because of the limitations of paragraph 30. This latest plan was put forward as a direct response to the threat of the German Austrian women's movement. The Wiener Frauenrechtskomitee was trying to create an all-Austrian women's suffrage organisation. In early 1912 they had invited delegates from non-German women's organisations to discuss this in Vienna. But they had insisted that German was the only official language and on a degree of centralisation which would severely limit the autonomy of Bohemian and Moravian women's societies. Considering the comparative records of the Czech and Austrian women's movements this was hardly fair. The Czech delegates refused to have anything to do with the proposal and walked out.<sup>67</sup>

The threat of a powerful German women's suffrage organisation possibly usurping the place of the Czech one was felt more in Moravia than in Bohemia. In both provinces the women's movement was centred around the capital, but Brno had a much larger German population than Prague. It already had a strong women's section of the German social democratic women's movement, and the German

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67. Právo ženy, (1912), II, number 10.



women in its population were actively involved in the German feminist movement.<sup>68</sup> Thus Moravian women thought that the danger of being overtaken by their national enemies needed to be dealt with quickly by a show of Czech unity from Czech women all over the empire.

The plan for a Czech Women's Suffrage Union was initiated by Moravian women, in particular Zdenka Wiedermannová Motyčková, the leader of the Organisation of Progressive Women in Moravia and the editor of both Moravian women's journals (Ženská revue, 1905-14, and Právo ženy, 1912-14). The original suggestion, printed in Právo ženy in March 1912, was simply for an all-Czech organisation. On the one hand it would give women support to fight for their rights within their parties: on the other, it would unite women to fight for their rights against the government.<sup>69</sup> (This was just at the time when the Diet committee had rejected all amendments in favour of women to the electoral reform.) This suggestion lay dormant for nearly a year, but at the beginning of 1913 it was again taken up by Právo ženy. 1913 was the year of the fifth congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, which was to be held in Budapest. Delegates were scheduled to visit other Austrian cities on their way to the congress; the creation of a Czech suffrage union was seen as a fitting addition to the feminist celebrations. The Organisation of Progressive Women in Moravia sent questionnaires to women organised in political parties and to the W.S.C., asking their opinion of the proposal. Women in the National Socialist,

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68. They had just formed a German women's suffrage committee in early 1910. (Jus Suffragii, April, 1910.)

69. Právo ženy, (1912), II, number 10.

Young Czech and Progressive parties were generally favourable. So, basically, was the W.S.C., but it thought that while paragraph 30 was still in force, such a step would be unwise.<sup>70</sup> Wiedermannová, however, went ahead with her plans. A meeting was called in June 1913 while the guests to the IWSA congress were visiting Prague. Few interested parties were able to brief a delegate to attend because they were so busy arranging for the guests to be entertained:<sup>71</sup> nevertheless, over the summer, the statutes of the new organisation were prepared and were published in Právo ženy in September. They were then discussed and criticised, especially by the W.S.C. A further meeting was held in December in order to elect a committee to establish the Union but by then disagreement had grown, so that only a separate Union for Moravia, rather than the all-Czech one originally envisaged was set up.

During the autumn of 1913, as the procedure for establishing the suffrage union seemed to be moving inexorably forward discontent grew with Wiedermannová's apparently dictatorial methods and the lack of time allowed for discussion. The need for a suffrage union, self-evident to the Moravian organisation, was not so clear to some women in the Bohemian feminist movement. They thought, also, that there were several significant issues at stake which should be discussed. The first point made by the W.S.C. in its criticism of the proposed statutes of the Union was that to unite Czech women, wherever they lived, into such an organisation was unrealistic because

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70. Právo ženy, (1913), III, number 17.

71. PNP.LA. 0. Sedlmayerová. MS. "Český svaz pro volební právo žen."



political conditions and the development of the suffrage movement varied considerably from place to place. Whereas women had voting rights to the Diet in Bohemia they had no such rights anywhere else. The women's suffrage movement, though developed in Bohemia and Moravia scarcely existed in Silesia and Vienna. It would be much better, they thought, for separate suffrage unions to be created for each land, as they would thus be able better to respond to individual conditions. A centralised organisation would also be more complicated and expensive. It would require more administrators; the yearly delegate conferences held alternately in each province and the committee meetings would involve expensive travelling. The proposed system of financing the Union (through membership subscriptions and gifts) was unrealistic. The W.S.C., for example, was kept going solely from the contributions of its individual members; they could afford no more. Such a degree of centralisation, the W.S.C. thought, would also cause trouble with the police. An application by Austrian women to form just such a suffrage union had been rejected by the police on the grounds that it contravened the provisions of paragraph 30 - it would be far better to wait to form the Czech union until the new law of association came into force in 1915.<sup>72</sup> The other aspect of this centralisation which the W.S.C. criticised was that it seemed to leave very little freedom to individual women's societies, whose rights vis-a-vis the Union were nowhere clearly defined. Františka Plamínková felt that such societies were the most important part of the women's movement and

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72. F. Plamínková, "Český svaz pro volební právo žen", in: Časopis českých učitelek, 1913, pp. 45-8.



women's growing consciousness of their political demands:

"To us women's right to vote is not primarily a political question, but rather a demand which each woman makes when she has reached a high level in the development of social purpose and social work so that, by getting the vote she can support and deepen all her activity.

A woman who is active in public life will reach this stage earlier and more intensely than a woman who devotes herself to the household. From this it follows that we will find a greater understanding for the suffrage movement among women who are already organised in various societies. Thus we conclude that the most certain way to organise the suffrage movement is to arrange the establishment of sections for women's suffrage beside existing women's organisations, rather than establish independent organisations."<sup>73</sup>

The arguments of the W.S.C., as the most experienced organisation in the suffrage field, carried some weight in Bohemia. They managed to bring the State Rights Radicals, the Agrarians, and National Socialists, all of whom had been in favour of the plan at the beginning of the autumn, over to their side by the time the decisive meeting took place on December 6th 1913. In addition, they had sown the seeds of doubt in the minds of the Progressive women, who came over to their side during the meeting. Thus, at the meeting, it was the W.S.C.'s counter suggestion to set up local unions rather than the original idea of setting up an all-Czech one which triumphed.<sup>74</sup> The actual decision, however, pales into insignificance beside the recriminations which ensued. These show - once again - the extent to which petty jealousies could dominate a movement which tried very hard to ignore the political differences which existed between many

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73. Právo ženy, (1913), III, number 31.

74. Právo ženy, (1913-4), IV, number 1, and Sedlmayerová, MS "Český svaz"...

sections of its membership. They demonstrate also the uneasy relationship which existed between feminists in Bohemia and those in Moravia, and reveal something about the oligarchical nature of the Moravian Women's movement.

Zdenka Wiedermannová accused the Bohemian women, especially Plamínková, of wishing to dominate the suffrage movement and of being unable to tolerate opposition. She also complained that members of the W.S.C. were keener to shine on the international suffrage scene than work at home:

"Our political women's movement has come to a standstill... The reason is that, through the influence of certain persons, representatives of our suffrage movement, it has become too dependent on the international women's movement and less so on its own national forces, the bearers of this movement, Czech women."<sup>75</sup>

Plamínková resisted the temptation to join battle at this level of personal vendetta and confined her remarks to discussing the role of the W.S.C. If anyone had taken it to be the leading force in the Bohemian women's suffrage movement, she said, then this was based on the work it had done for the cause. It was a completely democratic organisation in which all the work was shared and there was no hierarchy - anyone could join. She reiterated her judgment that a suffrage union would indeed be a good idea, but the time was not yet ripe; arguments like this could not, however, heal the breach with Wiedermannová.

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75. Ibid., (1913-4), IV, number 1. This was rather unfair, since Moravian women had been represented at international conferences - see Appendix 2.



No doubt the W.S.C. did have a leading role. It had gained such credence in the feminist movement because of the work it had done, but this did not alter the fact that it dominated the movement and was itself dominated by a small group of women, not particularly representative of different trends in women's political development. It dominated the movement because it had undertaken the campaign for women's suffrage first, had stuck to it and had finally been successful within the very limited terms it set itself. It had established itself as a quasi-independent authority on the issue.

But the influence which the committee felt it could exert as a kind of elder stateswoman also caused resentment, especially among the women in political parties who were not represented on it. Several women mentioned this in the preliminary discussions on the Union; Anna Teysslerova (a National Socialist) for example, complained that it had always confronted the parties with a *fait accompli*, never really giving them a chance to participate constructively in the campaign.<sup>76</sup> The attitude of the women's sections of the various parties to the original suggestion for a suffrage union shows that they welcomed a proposal which would give them a say on the question. The Moravian parties and the Young Czechs always remained firm supporters of the plan. The Bohemian parties were persuaded to withdraw their support only after Wiedermannová had shown herself completely inaccessible to compromise. Perhaps they felt that the dominance of an organisation which they knew would be better than that of one they did not, and that they might easily have as little

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76. Právo ženy, (1913-4), IV, number 1.



freedom to change things under the new system as under the old.

Moravian women saw the power of the W.S.C. in another light as well - Bohemian dominance of Moravia. The Bohemians could be quite patronising about Moravia and took advantage of this quarrel to give vent to a few contemptuous comments about the journalistic level of Ženská revue and Právo ženy, deriding their attempts to be independent of the Bohemian feminist press.<sup>77</sup> Wiedermannová in turn attributed some of the ill-feeling to Bohemian jealousy that this idea had come out of a Moravian women's organisation. But the suspicion that Wiedermannová was empire-building was not entirely unfounded. She might accuse Plamínková of dictatorship, but in fact she had managed to make herself a key figure in the Moravian women's movement. Not only was she editor and owner of the only two women's journals to be published in Moravia, but she had more than once expressed the hope that one of these (Právo ženy) would become the official organ of the suffrage union once it was founded.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, her political support was hardly disinterested: of the four women's organisations who supported her at the end, one - the Moravian National Socialists - was led by her sister and another - the Organisation of Progressive Women in Moravia - by herself.

This was the last dispute of the pre-war Czech women's suffrage movement and as such it illustrates many of the problems which beset it. The movement had reached the stage where it could have little more effect in its present form. Organisational changes could

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77. Ženský obzor, (1912-3), XII, number 10.

78. Ibid.

not really alter this; what was needed was the abolition of the ban on women's political activity. This was the only way to open up the women's suffrage debate, which was still confined to a small circle of people. Organisational changes would have no effect on the composition of this circle; they would merely re-distribute power within it.

An assessment of the W.S.C. should always take into account the limitations imposed on it by paragraph 30, but there are nevertheless aspects of their activity which seem misconceived. In particular, one could point to their concentration on the Diet and the possibility of electoral reform. This was perfectly understandable in terms of the need to base the new reform on genuine universal suffrage. However, it brought in its wake the inevitable attention to women's existing property franchise and the need to defend it. While it became clearer and clearer that nothing was going to be achieved in the Diet, and that if anything was achieved it would be at the expense of electoral reform, the W.S.C. did not shift its attention to other areas. Thus it became unintentionally isolated from the progressive political parties who saw it as a middle class organisation with middle class aims. These politically organised women were deprived of any opportunity to step in and change it because of its loose structure and the preponderance of non-aligned women in it. But they were wrong to blame the W.S.C. alone for their failure. Political parties themselves were often unwilling to give time to organisations which did not exactly correspond to their ideas. Thus it sometimes happened that women in the individual parties were prepared to co-operate, but that the male leadership would not let them. This was true especially of the

Social Democrats, but also of the Progressives and the National Socialists. Misunderstanding and distrust were, therefore, often mutual and worked against the elaboration of an effective compromise between 'feminism' and 'politics'.



### CONCLUSION

The Czech feminist movement was not an unsuccessful one.

It was small, but by 1914 it had several achievements to its credit, particularly in education and the fight for political rights. It had managed to establish some sort of collective identity through the organisations it had set up and the journals it published, and it had a position in the international women's movement. In many respects the Czechs had done as well as, if not better than their sisters elsewhere.

The factors which inhibited the movement's development were both internal and external. The political situation in the Bohemian Lands before 1914 and the constraints imposed on women by their lack of civil and political rights made it hard to organise a political women's movement or - once organised - to find a useful outlet for its energies. But in any case the feminists themselves were confused about what their goals were and how they could best achieve them. This confusion was expressed principally in the endless debates about organisation which dogged the movement.

These debates were additionally complicated by the nationalist factor. Nationalism, the criterion of the national interest and national progress, provided the most powerful impetus for the Czech feminist movement. Like all other politically active Czechs, feminists were obsessed with their own nationality. The feminist movement was permeated with nationalist ideas, which informed its activity and development. On the plus side, nationalism was infinitely adaptable. The concept of women's equality within the

nation could inspire groups of feminists with entirely different ideas. Women who wanted to increase women's traditional power within a conventional family structure and women who wanted to make a fundamental change in the balance of power within the family could both claim that their aims were in the interest of the nation.

On the minus side, however, nationalism's adaptability and its role as an all-purpose legitimation also tended to obscure political issues for feminists. It confused the question of political commitment versus independent feminism because both independent feminists and those involved in political parties could claim to represent the nation. The self-image of Czech nationalists added another dimension to this problem. Czech nationalism and Czech nationalists were seen as fundamentally democratic and feminist; their commitment to women's rights was never really questioned. For these reasons the choice between the various means of struggle which might result in women's emancipation - whether independent feminism or political commitment - was never clearly defined. In the final analysis feminism was subordinated to an idealistic conception of nationalist politics.

Czech nationalism held out hopes of a better future. This both confused the issues at stake in the immediate struggle and made this struggle less important. One can illustrate this by pointing to the way that feminists attached little importance to fighting for legal changes. They assumed that an Austrian government would never improve women's legal status or grant them more civil rights, whereas a Czech government, naturally, would. Such an attitude tended also to obscure the structural problems which demands for



women's emancipation would inevitably encounter - the entrenched nature of men's political and social power, and the fact that men might benefit from women's subordination.

Since Czech feminists worked with the future in mind one should, perhaps try to judge them not only in terms of their success before 1914 but also in terms of what the future actually brought. When national liberation became first a possibility and then a reality, what happened to the women's movement? How did feminists participate in the fight for independence, and did this independence answer any of their demands?

As we have seen, the Czech feminist movement had reached a state of deadlock by 1914. There seemed to be no prospect of any fundamental changes until the new law of association came into force in 1915. The war changed the situation completely; not only the position and expectations of women but the political and social assumptions of Czech society as a whole. By the time it ended it was clear that women's position - as, indeed, that of the Czech nation - would never be the same again.

The feminist movement emerged from the war temporarily united, profiting from the fact that their war experiences had politicised large numbers of women. Many previously independent feminists now joined political parties, the better to bring their feminism to bear in the new national state.

This unity and sense of purpose was a product both of the growing realisation that the war would bring some form of national independence, and of the enormous social changes which it produced.



In the first instance the war's impact on women was economic, and they expressed their mounting anger at the dislocation it caused through traditional channels. It is probably true that, as in other countries, women in Bohemia moved into men's jobs when men were called up for military service. They were therefore more likely to be working in heavy industry and to be doing a greater variety of jobs. In men's absence women had to assume the total responsibility for providing for their families. Rapidly rising prices and acute shortages of essential items made this burden extremely onerous. These pressures, together with the general Czech alienation from the Austrian war effort, seem gradually to have pushed women into opposition to the government. They expressed this in demonstrations against shortages and high prices. A government which could not ensure supplies of anything could not expect to command much affection; as the situation grew worse throughout 1916 and 1917 protest actions increased in number and changed in character. From fairly orderly deputations they became violent demonstrations accompanied by strikes. Finally, many demonstrators turned to direct action, stealing food from railway trucks. As the war progressed the basic problems of getting enough food to exist came to dominate all others. These types of protest against shortages, initiated and participated in mainly by women, became the main method of protest against the government, outnumbering strikes. The increasing violence and militancy which characterised them was an index of the disintegration of the Monarchy and the loss of confidence in its ability to survive.<sup>1</sup>

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1. L. Otahálová, Souhrnná hlášení presidia pražského mistodržitelství o protistátní, protirakouské a protiválečné činnosti v Čechách 1915-1918. Prague, 1957.  
"Příspěvek k národně osvobozenému boji lidu v českých zemích; srpen 1914 - březen 1917." Rozpravy CSAV, řada společenských věd, roč. 74, (1964), seš. 3.

There is also some evidence that women were becoming increasingly militant at work as well as at home. According to Luisa Landová-Štychová, the following notice was put up in all factories at the end of 1917 by the military authorities, and addressed "To women workers":

"Women workers are most emphatically warned to refrain from any attempt to lead astray, persuade or incite their male colleagues. Any such activity will be followed by the strictest punishment according to the letter of the law."<sup>2</sup>

Women were only marginally involved in the attempts to organise resistance to the Monarchy which took place outside its frontiers. Politically, they were active only on the domestic front and, like the other political forces in the country they only found a voice again after the relaxation which accompanied the recalling of the Reichsrat in May 1917. Feminism suffered a severe setback at the beginning of the war because most of the organisations through which it worked were limited in their activity; censorship also limited the scope of women's journals. Lectures and meetings continued, but on innocuous, non-controversial subjects. Feminist debate stagnated as well, and there was a general feeling that the coming of the war had proved that feminist propaganda could have no influence on the way men ran the world. "Our feminism has achieved little; what has been achieved has been achieved by women but without feminism", said one typical contributor to Ženský svět in 1915.<sup>3</sup> If war was what came of men's politics, clearly women could do better; not, however, by engaging in politics but by exercising their traditional

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2. Luisa Landová-Štychová, Sociálně revoluční význam 14 října. Prague, n.d., p. 17.
  3. Ženský svět (1915), pp. 9-11.



influence in the spheres allotted them by nature. Most writers to these women's journals at that point interpreted the influence of the war on women in terms of the effect of the absence of men - how wonderful it was that women had shown that they could carry on without them.

The political scope which women had possessed before the war was even further restricted when war broke out. The Czech Social Democratic women's organisation was closed down immediately the war started and its journal, Ženský list, stopped. It managed to start another journal, Zajmy žen, in 1916 but the political organization remained illegal. The only scope for Social Democratic women was in the women's trade union, the "Society of women and girls employed in domestic work and industry," which remained active, although with a very reduced membership. National Socialist women were even harder hit; their journal and their political and trade union organisation were illegal for the duration of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile women could still make their influence felt in more traditional ways. Women teachers, for example, undermined compulsory Germanisation and the use of the German language by circulating forbidden nationalist books and encouraging nationalist entertainments. Teachers and women students in Prague set up kindergartens and teaching groups for children who were not at school - either because their schools were closed for lack of heat or staff or because they were meant to be out hunting for coal or queueing for food. This

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4. The Austrian social democratic women's movement, however, was allowed to continue meeting throughout the war.



kind of activity became widespread after 1917, when the privations of the war had begun to affect all social classes severely. At the end of 1917 the writer Ružena Svobodová founded an organisation named České srdce (Czech heart) which would take needy children out of Prague and lodge them in the country, where they would get fresh air and at least some food.

It was in 1917 also that women again began to be active politically. This was the time when opposition to the Habsburg Monarchy really began to crystallise, both in political and economic terms. In women's case, too, their growing militancy in the economic sphere began gradually to find a political voice. The writers' manifesto of May 1917 seems to have been the signal for Czech women to make their feelings of opposition known. Eliška Máchová organised a similar manifesto in Moravia in June 1917, signed, apparently, by 125,000 people.<sup>5</sup> Bohemian women, slightly piqued by the Moravian women's success, organised a limited version of the same thing, signed only by famous women. They demanded a Czech state, votes for women and peace, presumably what the Moravian women had demanded too.

Women's organisations expressed this change of mood and, taking advantage of the political relaxation which had accompanied the recalling of the Reichsrat in May 1917, became more active. The Central Czech Women's Society, previously one of the most old-fashioned, assumed an almost revolutionary role:

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5. LA PNP, Anna Bayerová. Letter from P. Moudrá, 8th August 1917.

"Women also created their own revolutionary organisational network, whose leadership set itself up quite by chance as part of the Central Society, the so-called "Social Section". In reality this social section was referred to by the majority of its members as the Women's Revolutionary Committee."<sup>6</sup>

The Czech Women's Club also resumed activity at about this time with a series of lectures on feminism and socialism, organised by Frantiska Plamínková.

After the Epiphany Declaration, (6th January 1918), women felt they ought to organise something similar for themselves, to reassure people that they also were fighting for a national state and to assert women's right to speak and make demands. A meeting was therefore called by the Women's Suffrage Committee on 20th January 1918 - a meeting so well-attended that it had to go on in three halls simultaneously. During February, March and the first half of April, 18 similar meetings took place, usually called by the Central Society or the Club. A meeting on 17th February, for example, was addressed by representatives of three very different points of view, Víková Kunětická, Plamínková, and Schneiderová, a Social Democrat. The police spy present noted that not only did they demand freedom for the Czech people, but they also had "socialist aspirations". The meeting ended with singing national songs, and there were street disturbances afterwards as participants attempted to sing them in the street.<sup>7</sup> The demands made by these meetings became more and more outspoken until the Central Society received an angry letter from the Prague police. This pointed out

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6. Landová Štychová, Sociálně revoluční význam..., p. 6.

7. SÚA. PM 1911-20, 8/5/47/8: 5835.



that the society's recent activity had gone far beyond the limits of its statutes and accused it of organising a movement of women which had become dangerous to the maintenance of public order.<sup>8</sup> Its activity was therefore suspended. In an internal memorandum the police elaborated the reasons for their uneasiness. Many of these meetings had been held in working-class areas (one in Karlin, for instance, had attracted 2,500 women)<sup>9</sup> and the police thought they had had an agitating effect on the "lowest classes of women". A search of the society's offices was ordered in the hope that enough material would be found to justify its dissolution.

The suspension of the society put a stop to the open and organised expression of women's opposition to the Monarchy, but underground activity of course continued. A conference of Slav women which assembled in Prague in June 1918 was heavily criticised because its Czech representatives were judged to be middle-class and unrepresentative of the increasingly working-class oriented Czech women's movement.<sup>10</sup> Despite the restrictions imposed on independent feminist activity, many women who had previously been independent feminists were joining political parties and trying to bring their feminism to bear in that context.. (This widespread radicalisation was one of the most significant effects of the war.) Others, like Luisa Landová-Štychová, were already committed to a party and saw their task in terms of bringing these parties to a consciousness of women's demands. When the Socialist Party was

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8. SÚA. PM 1911-20, 8/5/47/8: 12590.

9. AHMP. XXII 185, record of meeting on 4th April 1918.

10. Zenský svět, (1918), numbers 5-6.



formed, Plamínková and other women members spent a lot of time discussing the policy on women which they thought the new party constitution should adopt. Later in the year they turned their feminist scrutiny on the constitution of the new republic. According to one of the participants they did not limit themselves to women's rights but tried to express a feminist point of view on all questions.<sup>11</sup>

After the seizure of power on 28th October 1918 women found that they still had to contend with anti-woman attitudes on the part of many male politicians. Despite the assertion in the Washington Declaration, later included in the constitution of the new republic, that women should be placed on an equal footing with men in all respects, they found it difficult to send a delegate to the Revolutionary National Assembly. Eventually they were allowed to send Landová-Štychová - she was also a representative of the anarcho-communists and two birds were thus killed with one stone. But this struggle was only a foretaste of things to come. Feminists found that many of their hopes in the new republic were disappointed. In many respects it was as prepared to discriminate against women as the Monarchy had been. Women were granted political rights but in many respects their civil rights remained unchanged. The First Republic retained many parts of the Civil Code of the Habsburg Monarchy - including the stipulations that the man was the head of the family and that he would dispose of his wife's dowry.<sup>12</sup> Other

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11. L. Landová-Štychová, "Několik vzpomínek...", in Kniha života, práce a osobnost F. Plamínkové, pp. 286-290.

12. L. Landová-Štychová, Žena v manželství, Prague, n.d. (post 1918).

rights, which feminists had assumed would be granted without question, had to be fought for. The right of women teachers, and especially civil servants and other state employees to marry was won after a battle. But the first reaction to the economic crisis of 1926 was an attempt to reimpose a marriage bar; feminists were rapidly reduced to protecting what they had won rather than making any new gains.<sup>13</sup>

In practice, therefore, the democratic nature of the Czech nation was a myth as far as women were concerned. Despite their opposition to the Monarchy during the war and despite the high level of political awareness which existed among them by 1918, women gained little more from a liberated Czechoslovakia than their sisters elsewhere won from less "enlightened" governments. But even if it was fuelled by mistaken ideas the pre-war women's movement did achieve something. It created an organisation and trained leaders who were able once more to take up the struggle for women's rights, against discrimination, this time in a Czech state.

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13. Albina Honzáková, "Zápas za zrušení vnuceného celibátu vydelečně činných žen", in Kniha života, p. 59.

## APPENDIX I : BIOGRAPHIES

### Bohuslava Kecková (1854-1911)

Completed her gymnasium studies privately and did the "maturita" in 1874 at the Malostranské gymnasium. She qualified as a doctor in Zurich in 1880 and, being unable to obtain nostrification, worked in Prague as a "porodní asistentka". In 1892 she went to the occupied territories (Bosnia and Hercegovina) to work as a doctor, in the same way as Bayerová did, and in 1896 became a recognised "zemská lékařka".

### MUDr Anna Honzáková (1875-1940)

One of the first pupils of Minerva, who led the campaign for women to be able to study medicine, and was the first Czech woman doctor to qualify at home - in 1902. After graduation she began to specialise in surgery, but in 1905 opened a practice specialising in women's complaints. She was active in the women's movement and was several times a member of the committee of the Czech Women's Club. She also had a keen interest in education, was a member of the Minerva committee from 1900 and was one of those who engineered the change of members on it in 1910.

### PhDr Albina Honzáková (1877-1973)

The younger sister of Anna Honzáková she, too, studied at Minerva and was one of the first women to study at the Philosophical Faculty at



Charles University, where she did history, graduating in 1901. She then went to work as a history teacher at Minerva. She was active in the women teachers' union, especially in the campaign against the celibacy rule, and was a member of the Minerva society, instrumental in changing the direction of the society in 1910. Her continued interest in education is shown in a book which she helped to edit on the 30th anniversary of Minerva's foundation (Československé studentky...) She was also a leading feminist, active particularly in the women's suffrage campaign, and was also a functionary of the Czech Women's Club from 1908-1914. A close friend of Frantiska Plamínková's, she edited a book to mark her 60th birthday in 1935 (Kniha Života...). After the first war she helped to organise education in Slovakia, teaching for a while in Trencin, and worked with the Women's National Council.

Eliska Máchová (1858-1926)

A teacher, active in the more charitable, patriotically-inclined wing of the Moravian women's movement. In 1899 she helped to found a shelter in Brno where working class women could stay the night and help to find work as servants. In 1902 she founded a domestic science school near Opava. She also helped to found Vesna, the first girls' high school in Moravia.

Karla Máchová (1853-1920) was the leader of the Czech Social Democratic women's movement from 1900 (the date of her appointment as the editor of Ženský list) till 1915. She came from a fairly radical background; her father, a smallholder and shopkeeper, knew Havlíček and used to distribute his Slovan. Her mother died when she was twelve; her father became ill and was unable to work. Karla had to take domestic jobs to help support her brother and sister. But she continued to go to school - which she described as "the only happiness I had" - and used to pay her fees by cleaning the classrooms in the mornings. In the mid 1870's (her autobiographical note, Denník z mého života is vague about dates) she won a place at teacher training college, and at about the same time became involved in the Social Democratic party. According to her own account she was the only woman in the party and was present at the Břevnov congress of 1878, though I can find no independent corroboration of this. Máchová's political beliefs gave her considerable trouble with the police and the education authorities. She never managed to obtain a permanent post with pension rights, and after 1881 she had to live by giving private lessons.

In 1893 she visited America, where she helped to run the Czech stall at the International Women's Exhibition in Chicago and edited the first American Czech women's paper, Ženské listy, which contributing articles about the USA to Ženské listy in Prague. In the 1880's and 1890's she was active in the American Ladies Club, where she organised entertainments for poor children, and in the Society of Czech Women Teachers.

Máchová edited Ženský list from 1900-1914, when it was closed down by the police. The party then put her on a small pension. In the early years of the war we hear of her visiting Alice Masaryková in prison in Vienna and bringing news of her to her mother in Prague. (Charlotte Masaryková and Máchová had met in the American Ladies Club in the 1880's and remained friends. They belonged to the same Social Democratic organisation in Malá strana.) Máchová utterly disagreed with the collapse of the Social Democrats' anti-war front in 1914 and this seems to have poisoned her relations with the party generally. The pension they gave her was small, inadequate to cope with wartime inflation, and they do not seem to have given her any other help. As the war went on she became very ill, and it was her friends within the feminist movement who came to her aid. She died of T.B. in 1920.

Pavla Moudrá (1861 - ?) Educated at the girls' high school in Prague. During her first marriage she founded a women's magazine, Lada. She left her husband and went as a governess to Russia; on her return she began to write feuilletons in Národní listy, which were published in 1900 under the title "Do rozmaru a do pláče". Her literary activity and friendship with Teréza Nováková led her towards Ženský svět, to which she became a frequent contributor. She was a pacifist and propounded her views in the women's movement, particularly in the Union of Czech Women's Societies, whose peace section she founded.



Teréza Nováková (1853-1912)

She was educated at Amerlingová's school; as a young woman she was an active member of the American Women's Club, and described her outlook in the mid-1870's as being: "the woman as a patriot, philanthropist, and in the service of the liberal national movement; the woman's personality fulfils itself in a passionate desire for education". On her marriage in 1876 she went to live in Litomysl, whose small-town atmosphere she found very oppressive. In 1882 she began to write, and her writing was later encouraged by Karolína Světlá, whose biography she wrote in 1890. From 1885 onwards she was active in the local women's society; her special interest was gathering material on local national life and customs, a habit which she continued and which played a very important part in her literary work. In 1895 she and her family returned to Prague, and she became involved in the women's movement, which was just beginning. She edited Ženský svět from its inception in 1897 and was closely involved in the foundation of the Czech Women's Club. Her thoughts on the women's movement are collected in Ze ženského hnutí, (1911), which reprints articles she wrote from 1900-1910. In her literary work she followed the tradition of Němcová and Světlá in writing novels which dealt with country life, often with a historic setting. However, Nováková's treatment of these themes was realistic rather than romantic.

Františka Plamínková (1875-1942)

Born in Prague, the youngest daughter of a shoe-maker. She attended the 'měšťanská škola' in Staré město, where one of her teachers was Bohuslava Sokolová, the sister of K. St. Sokol. She then went to teacher training college, from which she graduated in 1894. Her first posts were in South Bohemia, but she soon returned to Prague, where she taught at a primary school for three years. In 1898 she passed examinations to be able to teach at a 'měšťanská škola'. When university classes were opened to women she began to attend as an occasional student. She also began to work in the women's teachers' society at about this time, and was a supporter of the movement to abolish the celibacy rule. As a delegate representing women teachers at the first Czech women's conference in 1897 she became involved in the attempt to set up a women's club, and when this finally got off the ground in 1903 she was a member of the Club committee, holding various positions on the administration of the Club until 1913. The main focus of her activity before the war, however, was the suffrage movement, whose de facto leader she was from the very beginning. Before the war she was not a member of any political party and supported the line that feminists should be above parties. In 1918, however, she joined the Socialist Party, and was the only woman on their Executive Committee. During the First Republic she was a councillor in Prague and later a senator while continuing to lead the women's movement as head of the Women's National Council. In 1942 she was executed by the Nazis as part of the reprisals after the Heydrich affair. Despite the fact that she really dominated the women's movement from 1905 until 1942 she seems to have been held in great affection by all who worked with her.

(The only dissenting voice to this opinion would seem to be that of Zdenka Wiedermannová). She had enormous energy - until the first war she had a full-time job as well as organising the suffrage movement - and she expected comparable devotion to the cause from her co-workers. Plamínková never seems to have compromised her feminist principles. After 1918, for example, she did not relax in the expectation that the First Republic would automatically grant women what they had been demanding for so long but went on fighting - for women teachers' right to marry, for married women's right to work - and for all the rights which the government was more willing to support in theory than in practice.

Anna Schöntagová (1849-1926)

A teacher who lived by giving private lessons, she became involved in the women's movement when she was already over 50. She was instrumental in the foundation of the Czech Women's Club, and was a functionary of it from its inception; she was also very active in the Women's Suffrage Committee. Schöntagová was also involved in various organizations which sought to improve the lot of the private teacher, for example, the "Central Association of Private Teachers".



Olga Stranská (? - 1927)

She became involved in the feminist movement, on the prompting of Teréza Nováková, when her husband died. She was first a member of the Central Czech Women's Society, and then joined the Progressive party, becoming head of its women's section, the only woman on the Executive Committee, and responsible for the women's sections of Naše doba and Čas. A collection of her articles on the position of women was published in 1920 under the title Za novou ženou.

Luisa Landová-Štychová (1885- ? )

She was born in Kolín and had a convent education. She worked in a jewellers' in Vienna, and was also an actress for a short time. She married in 1908; her mother looked after the household, leaving Luisa free for her political work, which seems to have been mainly concerned with free motherhood and anti-clericalism. (Her articles on free motherhood are discussed below, p. ). In 1913, as a result of Bohuslav Vrbenský's plans to create a Czech Anarchist party she was chosen as head of the possible women's section of this, the "association of independent (neodvislých) women". In the same year she and her husband also founded the Association of Socialist Monists. Her activity in the anarcho-communist movement continued throughout the war in a number of different disguises (e.g. the Prague Astronomical Society). The Štychs helped to found the Prague Workers' Council in May 1917. She was a member of the Socialist Council, formed in June 1918 and, as an anarcho-communist became a member of the Socialist Party when it was formed in 1918,

and represented it in the National Assembly. She left it in 1923, founded something called Socialist Unity and, when this collapsed joined the Communist Party, for which she was an MP in 1925. She made her mark in the women's movement after the war especially by her support for abortion. She retired from public life some time in the 1920's and became a recluse.

Marie Tůmová (? -1925)

The daughter of Karel Tůma, at one time editor of Národní listy, she trained as a teacher and eventually became headmistress of the primary school in Žižkov, Prague. The main focus of her feminist activity was in the women's suffrage campaign, during which she stood twice, (in 1908 and 1909) as the candidate of the Women's Suffrage Committee in elections to the Diet. She was also active in the Czech Women's Club, whose vice-president she was from 1908-1913; in Minerva, on whose committee she served in 1910; and in the Union of Czech Women's Societies, whose vice-president she was in 1910. She never joined a political party. After 1918 she went to Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, where she organised the teaching of handwork.

Božena Víková-Kunětická (1862-1934)

Started off as an actress and then turned to writing plays and novels. Her favourite theme was the power and uniqueness of womanhood,

particularly motherhood, and her heroines are usually women who go through an unhappy relationship with a man, reject the man but, transformed by the experience of motherhood, keep the child and continue with their lives. Her somewhat mystical view of the value of feminity led her to reject the idea that material factors could be important in women's lives. She became head of the Young Czech women's organisation in 1909 and was elected to the Diet in 1912, but she was basically apolitical and tended to see her election as another blow for the feminine principle. She thought, for example, that women should represent only women and men only men. In her ideas she was very much opposed to Masaryk, whom she described as "uncreative". Her nationalism, also, sometimes took the form of racism, as when she voiced suspicions that Charlotte Masaryk must be Jewish.

Zdenka Wiedermannová-Motyčková (1868-1915)

She was a teacher in Moravia who taught for eighteen years and then went on to a pension so that she could devote herself to the women's movement. She founded an educational society - Dívčí akademie - in 1903, which set up the first two girls' gymnasiums in Moravia in 1907 and 1908. In 1905 she launched the first feminist journal in Moravia Ženská revue, and in 1911 followed this with Právo ženy, designated a "women's newspaper" rather than a journal. She was the founder of the Organisation of Progressive Women in Moravia, and originated the idea for a Czech Women's Suffrage Union. She married in 1910.



Fraňa Zeminová (1882-19?) was the youngest of twelve children.

Her father was an agricultural worker who moved to Prague in 1894.

There Zeminová attended commercial school and then worked for a printers' until 1918. She was the leader of the National Socialist women's movement from the party's foundation in 1898 until 1948.

During the First Republic she was a senator.

## APPENDIX II

### Bohemian women and the international women's suffrage movement

Bohemian women were always interested in anything to do with international feminism, although before 1914 they were principally involved in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. The Alliance was founded in 1904, at a conference in Berlin, and was the product of the more radical wing of the American women's movement.

Czech women were present at all its conferences, but they were not able to have any formal links with the Alliance until the rules governing membership were changed in 1909. Until that time only formally constituted suffrage societies had been allowed to be members; this ruled out women in the non-Hungarian lands of the Habsburg Monarchy, who were not allowed to form political societies. After 1909, however, informal committees of more than ten members were allowed to send representatives to Alliance conferences.

The Austrian, Bohemian and Galician women's suffrage committees then affiliated themselves. The Bohemian Women's Suffrage Committee seems to have been quite an active member of the Alliance.

Františka Plamínková was present at the Copenhagen conference of 1906 and the Amsterdam one of 1908. The Committee did not send a delegate to the London conference of 1909 because they were in the middle of Tůmová's election campaign. But they sent copies of a letter they had prepared to send to Tůmová's electors, which Carrie Chapman Catt, the President, and other officers of the Alliance signed. The 1911 conference in Stockholm was attended by Tůmová, representing the W.S.C. and the Society of Czech Women Teachers, another woman from the Committee who also represented the Czech

Women's Club, and a delegate from the Organisation of Progressive Women in Moravia. At the conference in Budapest in 1913 Tůmová was again a delegate, with Marie Štěpánková, a W.S.C. member, representing the Central Czech Women's Society. Božena Víková Kunětická spoke at the congress as the first woman MP in Central Europe.

From 1906 the IWSA published a journal, Jus Suffragii, to which the W.S.C. contributed regularly. Czech women's journals often reprinted information from it. After the First World War, Czech women continued and indeed intensified their participation in international feminist organisations. Františka Plamínková, for example, was vice-president of the International Council of Women and of the IWSA, and was also treasurer of the Open Door International.



TABLESGirls attending Gymnasia in the Non-Hungarian Lands of the Monarchy: 1905

Vienna	210
Prague (i) German	49
(ii) Minerva	160
Lemberg	239
Krakow	105

SOURCE: Österreichische Statistik

Number of gymnasia for girls

	1906/7	1907/8	1908/9	1911/12
Lower Austria	1	1	1	3
Bohemia	3	3	3	4
Moravia	-	-	-	2
Galicia	7	8	8	21
Salzburg	-	-	-	1
Tirol	-	-	-	1
Bukovina	-	-	-	1

SOURCE: Österreichisches Statistisches Handbuch: 1910, 1915.

Number of female university students 1897-1917

Year	Philos. Faculty			Medical Faculty			Pharm.	Total	of which	
	Reg.	Ext.	Hosp.	Reg.	Ext.	Hosp.			reg.	ext.
1897/8*)	10	15	-	-	-	-	-	25	10	15
1898/9	16	17	-	-	-	-	-	33	16	17
1899/1900	12	25	-	-	-	-	-	37	12	25
1900/01**)	8	46	-	8	1	-	-	63	16	47
1901/02	15	17	25	8	-	-	-	65	23	17
1902/03	18	10	74	5	-	-	-	107	23	10
1903/04	21	25	81	9	-	1	-	140	30	25
1904/05	25	63	66	7	3	5	-	169	32	66
1905/06	26	56	78	11	1	-	-	172	37	57
1906/07	23	97	82	7	-	-	-	209	30	97
1907/08	19	98	88	8	-	2	1	216	27	99
1908/09	39	111	85	19	-	-	1	255	58	112
1909/10	35	143	107	17	-	-	-	302	52	143
1910/11	50	169	98	29	1	1	-	348	79	170
1911/12	57	189	66	24	-	-	3	339	81	192
1912/13	66	211	62	51	-	1	4	395	117	215
1913/14	81	179	87	68	3	-	1	419	149	180
1914/15	128	112	69	121	2	1	6	439	249	120
1915/16	141	95	107	184	2	1	11	541	279	108
1916/17	171	72	137	249	-	2	13	644	420	85

\*) Regular study at the philosophical faculty was permitted after 1897/8.

\*\*) Regular study at the medical faculty was permitted after 1900/01.

SOURCE: Ženské studium, p. 70.

Former education of regular students at the philosophical faculty

Year	1897/8	1898/9	1899/1900	1900/01	1901/2	1902/3	1903/4	1904/5	1905/6	1906/7	1907/8	1908/9	1909/10	1910/11	1911/12	1912/13	1913/14	1914/15	1915/16	1916/17	Total
Number of students in 1st semester	3	6	1	0	9	5	8	4	11	3	0	26	2	23	3	27	28	57	32	53	301
<u>Girls</u> gymnas	-	6	-	-	9	5	8	-	8	-	-	24	-	21	-	17	7	35	13	27	180
real gymnas.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	8	5	26
<u>Boys</u> gymnas.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	-	3	8	1	5	10	36
real. gymn.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	3	3	8	4	3	4	26
realka	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
private study	3	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	7
external study at PF	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	4	3	3	5	20
lyceum teachers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
not given	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	3

SOURCE: Ženské studium, p. 71.



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